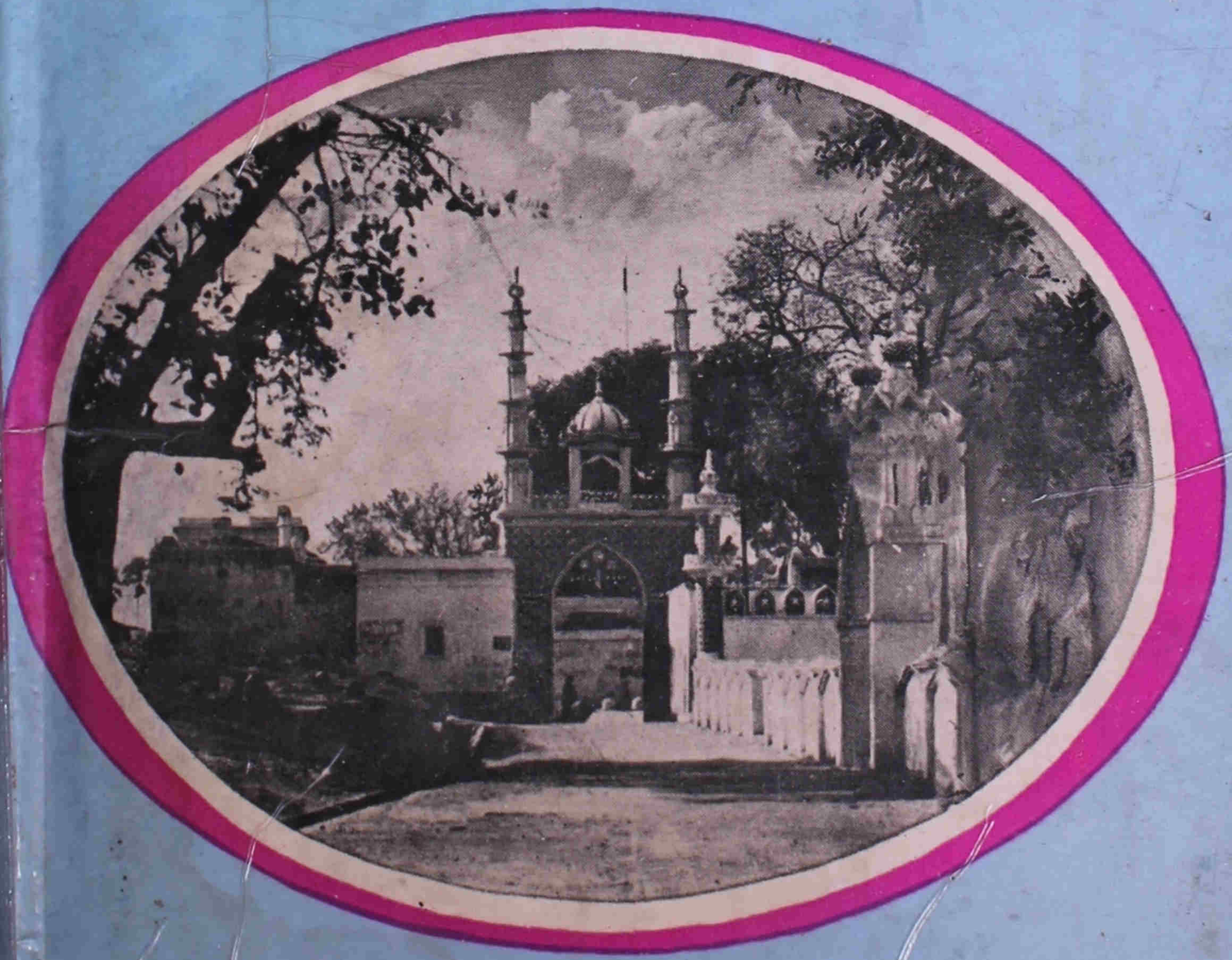
THE WAY OF A SUFI

SHARAFUDDIN MANERI

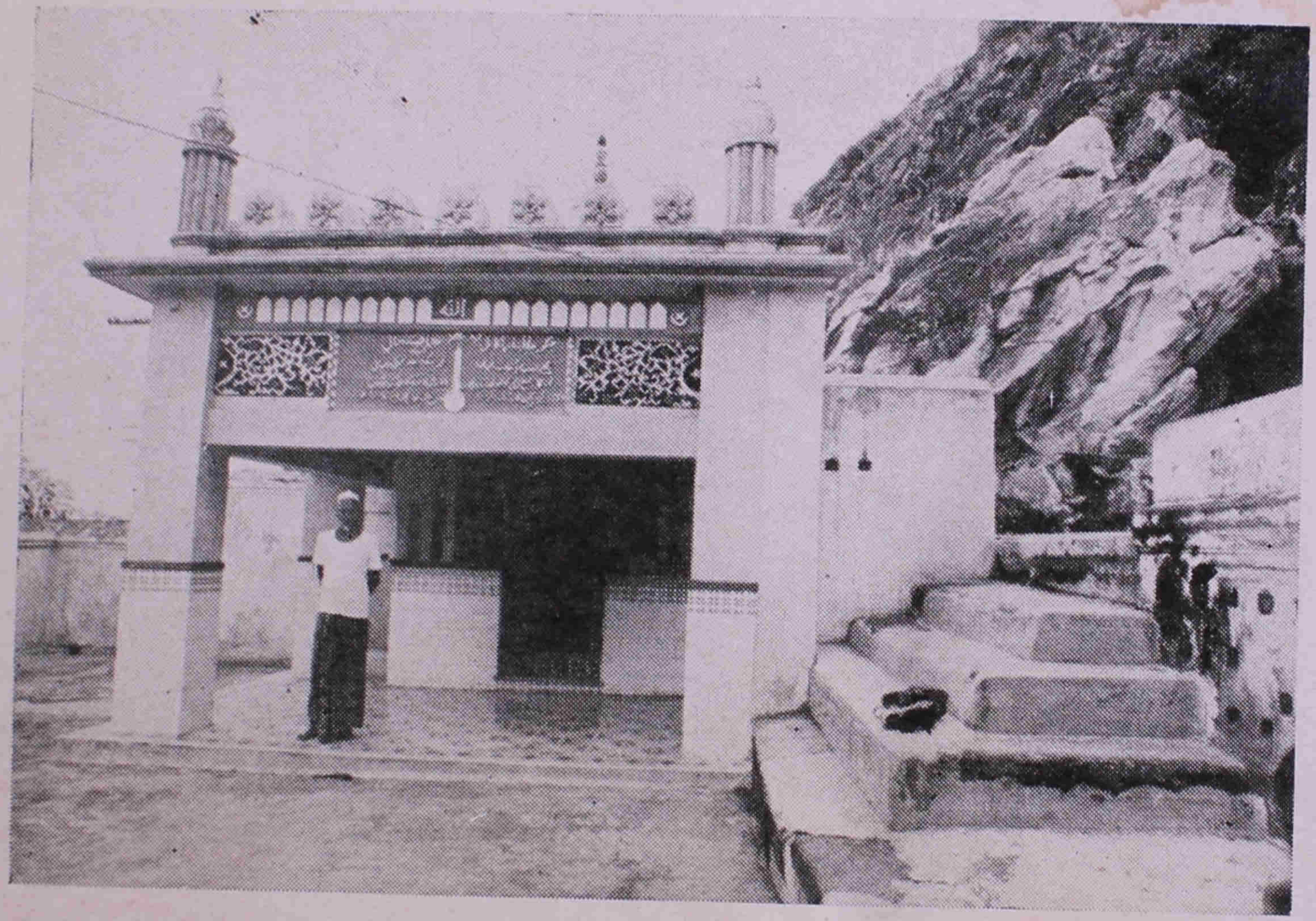


PAUL JACKSON S.J.

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Way of a Sufi is a study of the life, personality and teaching of Bihar's most eminent Sufi, **Sharafuddin Maneri** (died 1381 A.D.). The work situates his life, on the basis of a careful study of the Persian source material, against the known history of the period in an acceptable cronoloical framework; provides an illuminating study of Maneri the man, as revealed by his attitudes and dealings with people; and presents a synthesis of his spiritual teaching—the fruit of his rich inner experience—as found in his classical **Hundreds Letters.** Rarely has a personality from the Sultanate period (1206-1526) been presented with such painstaking care yet in such an eminently readable fashion.

The impact of the work is heightened by the presentation of passages translated by the author from the original Persian.



The path leading to the Dargah of Sharafuddin Maneri

THE WAY OF A SUFI SHARAFUDDIN MANERI

The Way of a Sufi
Sharafuddin Maneri

By

PAUL JACKSON, S.J.

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Dedicated

to

My Patents

To whom I owe so much

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Finally, there are many who have helped me with their encouragement and prayers and who, I trust, will recognize themselves in this silent tribute.

Transcription

Titles of books and technical terms have been given in the dimension system. Otherwise, forms commonly found in India usually without diacritical marks, have been freely utilised.

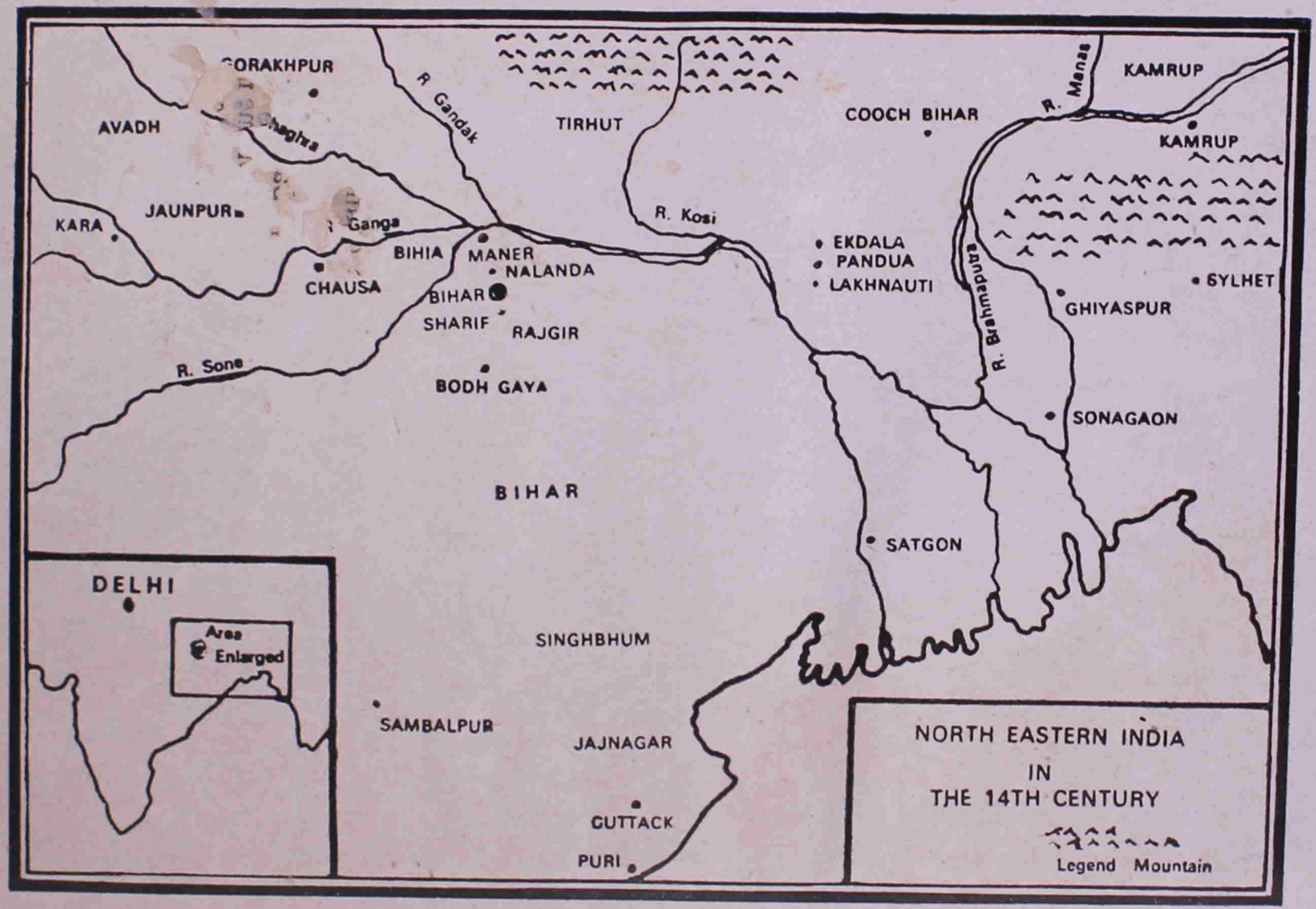
Footnotes

Secondary sources, when utilized, have been referred to in footnotes.

Primary materials, on which this study has mainly been based, are quoted in English translation. The full form of the work quoted can be found in the bibliography under "Persian Source Materials", at the end of this work. Chapter divisions and page or folio numbers are normally given. (e.g. Ma'dan, 19, p.164 refers to the text. *Ma'dan ul-Ma'ānī* referred to in the bibliography, chapter 19, page 164). Sometimes the reference begins with a number. (e.g. *200* 96, p. 493). This refers to the collection of letters known as *The Two Hundred Letters*, letter 96, page 493 in the text referred to in the bibliography.

Translations

All translations from the original Persian materials have been made by the author, with the assistance of Professor Syed Hasan Aɔkari.


GORAKHPUR
AVADH
Ghaghra
R Gandak
TIRHUT
COOCH BIHAR
R. Manas
KAMRUP
KAMRUP
JAUNPUR
KARA
Ganga
R. Kosi
EKDALA
PANDUA
LAKHNAUTI
BIHIA
MANER
NALANDA
CHAUSA
BIHAR
SHARIF
RAJGIR
R. Sone
BODH GAYA
R. Brahmaputra
SYLHET
GHIYASPUR
SONAGAON
BIHAR
SATGON
DELHI
Area Enlarged
SINGHBHUM
SAMBALPUR
JAJNAGAR
CUTTACK
PURI
NORTH EASTERN INDIA
IN
THE 14TH CENTURY
Legend Mountain

Foreword

Islam originated in the Prophet Muhammad's encounter with the Unknown in the cave of Hira. It was his silent meditation in loneliness which brought him face to face with the mystery of the Divine and overpowered him. Sufism may be said to be the continuation of the early experiences of the Prophet. Islam later developed into a magnificent civilization; expanded far and wide; and still persists as an historical force to be reckoned with. But whatever may be the glory and glamour of Islam as a civilization, its manifold expression obtains meaning only through its ultimate concern. Unfortunately it is just this inner dimension of Islam which is being disowned by an influential wing of contemporary Muslim thought. Islam is reduced to an ideology stripped of its mystic pathos. Even as God is both manifest (zāhir) and hidden bāṭin), every act of worship has both an inner and an outer aspect. This is how Sufis understood the Islamic vision of life. Even scheduled prayers and punctilious conformity to formal prescriptions lose their merit if they are not sustained by singularity of mind and purity of intention.

Sufism as the inner voice of Islam is not marked by any linear development but shows great variations in its attitude and expression. Even the orders (silsilas) in which Sufism crystallized itself show remarkable differences in their practices and observances. While music is shunned by some, for example, it is fervently cultivated by others.

Nevertheless, the Islamic accent is seldom lost in all authentic varieties of Sufic expression. When Sufis attempted a theoretical formulation of their experiences and resorted to conceptual analysis, however, serious conflicts came to the surface. Some subscribed to the unity of Being (waḥdat al-wujūd) as the only valid inference to be derived from their experience, while others disputed this claim vehemently and presented testimonial monism (waḥdat ash-shuhūd) as an alternative. In fact, mystic experience as such is incommunicable and, the moment it is vocalized, it gives rise to differences in interpretation. What is of value in Sufism is its presentation of Islam as a living experience and its constant reminder to man not to forget whence he came and whither he returns (Q 2 : 156).

In recent times have we witnessed a great resourgence of interest in Sufism and important studies, especially by European scholars, have appeared. It has also been realized, though sometimes reluctantly, that Sufism is Quranic in origin and is not alien to the Quranic spirit, as the famous Light Verses amply testify (Q. 24 : 35). The Indian subcontinent, however, where almost all the silsilas are represented, has been grossly neglected. It is to the credit of Dr. Paul F.J. Jackson to have introduced us to a remarkable seeker of God. His excellent translation of *The Hundred Letters* of Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri has found a very appreciative response from students of mysticism. It was readily recognized as a valuable contribution to the understanding of Sufism in general and of its flowering in the Indian subcontinent in particular. That a Christian scholar should have found in the Sufi saint of Bihar a kindred soul is no coincidence : however Christianity and Islam may differ in their dogmatic formulation, there is a close affinity in those spheres of experience which words cannot convey.

Dr. Jackson has now gone a step further in his new work, *The way of a Sufi : Sharafuddin Maneri.* The Sufic experience, we know, is highly personal and, as a consequence, the personality of the recipient of the divine grace cannot be ignored. Hence it is in the fitness of things that we should know what sort of man he was ; what was the milieu in which his

quest for Truth was undertaken ; and the historical forces which were then at work. The author has based his account on the original Persian sources and given us a vivid picture of his life. Lastly he gives us the essence of his teaching as can be culled from his *Letters*. We cannot have a better guide than Dr. Jackson to introduce us to the Sufi Saint's life and teaching. As this latter was greatly inspired by the Quran, the relevance of the Quran to Islamic spirituality if freely recognized and his teaching is understood in the broad spectrum of Sufism. Nowhere is to be found, perhaps, so deep a perception of spiritual life as in his observation : "Not being taken to task for notable offences is a proof of one's spiritual inferiority, while chastisement for even slight offences is a proof of one's spiritual stature". (*The Hundred Letters*, p. 87).

At a time when the world is too much with us and we are lost in the ignoble strife of a competitive world we should listen to those whom power cannot lure away from their quest and who, being at peace with themselves, infuse peace in us and are ever prepred to meet their Lord, being reconciled to His will. As the Quran says : "Verily to the Friends of God no fear befalls nor do they grieve" (Q. 10: 63). They also exemplify in their lives the tradition attributed to the Prophet, "Die before you die."

May God Lead us along their path, the path of those whom He has favoured and who are blessed with His proximity !

Syed Vahiduddin

Introduction

This study is based mainly on an examination of works written either by Sharafuddin Maneri himself or by his immediate disciples. An attempt to construct a biography has been made from material gleaned from these primary sources. His teaching about the Way to God has been culled from *The Hundred Letters*, the first work to emanate from his pen. This embodies, in all its freshness, the fruit of long years of study and spiritual endeavour. Further refinement can be expected in the remaining years of his life, yet this first expression has prior claim to our attention. The refinements of later years can be understood only insofar as they are perceived in relationship to this pristine expression of man's spiritual odyssey.

The study is divided into three parts. The first consists of two chapters which are devoted to Sharafuddin's life. The second consists of one chapter devoted to a study of the man himself as he emerges from the sources studied. The third contains three chapters in which the salient features of the Way are presented.

It should be noted that Sharafuddin's teaching about the Way to God is, ultimately, the fruit of his own experience. In the final analysis it is not the quotations from the Qur'an, the Traditions, the stories, or the undoubted learning of Sharafuddin which gives unction to his teaching, but the fact that he is sharing with us what he himself has experienced.

The emphasis on experience needs a little explanation. The present writer's interest in this whole approach grew over a period of two years devoted to producing an English rendition of *The Hundred Letters.*[1]

The conviction took root and began to grow that here was a man who was speaking from his own personal experience. This was, quite naturally, expressed in terms of his own Islamic faith. His book has to be classified as a work *of* spirituality, not one *about* spirituality. Only a book of the former category is capable of touching hearts.

Interestingly enough the human heart, considered as the seat of experience, is the most frequently occurring term after the divine name in *The Hundred Letters.* Time and again Sharafuddin harks back to the heart of man as the "place", par excellence, where the divine activity occurs. This is also an unconscious testimony to the fact that he had experienced this activity within the depths of his own sensitive heart.

This is precisely why he has such a universal appeal. Since he speaks from his own heart he also speaks to other hearts. Like all giants of the human spirit he transcends the limits of his own religious tradition without, however, in any way repudiating it. Lesser men, never having transcended symbols, have nothing but those same symbols to offer. They may have an impact on people who are used to them, but have no wider appeal. Those self-same symbols, however, when used to express the wonders of the divine activity in the heart of man, come alive for others as well. That is what has happened here.

In attempting to judge the value of a spiritual work from the past we are often forced to rely simply on a critical study of the text itself. For example, *The Cloud of Unknowing* is a very famous work on mysticism produced in fourteenth-century England, but nobody knows exactly who the author was, though certain deductions can be made from the work itself. In the present study, however, a great deal of contemporary

---

1. *Sharafuddin Maneri*: *The Hundred Letters*, ed. by P. Jackson, S.J., Paulist Press, New York, and S.P.C.K., London. 1980.

material in Persian is available. It is sprinkled – though not very generously—with biographical and even autobiographical references. When studied carefully, these can be used to construct an outline of Sharafuddin's life.

It is necessary, therefore, to cast a critical eye upon this material in order to ascertain its historical value. It falls into two categories : letters and discourses. Of the former there are, in addition to *The Hundred Letters*, a large collection known as *The Two Hundred Letters*. This is a round figure and there are actually more than 200 letters in the collection. There are other extant collections which are really sections of this collection of 200 letters. Another distinct collection is *The Twenty-Eight Letters*, which are all that remain from more than 200 letters written to Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, Sharafuddin's most important disciple and spiritual successor. Sharafuddin wrote many more letters which are referred to in our primary material but extant copies are not known. It is possible that some may come to light.

The first collection is really a treatise written during AD 1346-47 in the form of letters to an important disciple, Qazi Shamsuddin of Chausa. It contains no directly biographical material. The second collection, written to various people and compiled twenty-two years after the first (i.e. in early AD 1368), does contain some such material, as does the third collection.

It is the second category, however, which is rich in both biographical and autobiographical material though, as previously mentioned, one has to search a great deal in order to discover it. The recording of the discourses of the Master, which included the questions of those in the assemblies and the answers of the Master, was the most distinctive form of spiritual writing employed by the Chishti Sufis in Delhi. It was through such discourses, for example, that we are enabled to get somewhat acquainted with Sheikh Nizāmuddin Auliya, (died AD 1325). Fortunately, this Delhi tradition among the Chishtis was continued in Bihar by the members of the Firdausi Order, founded there by Sharafuddin himself. It was principally the indefatigable, devoted and intelligent Zain Badr Arabi who took it upon himself to begin to record what took place at the

various assemblies during which the Venerable Master—as he refers to Sharafuddin—answered difficulties and discoursed on spiritual topics. It was he who had collected the letters sent to Qazi Shamsuddin into a single volume. From his pen comes both the earliest record of Sharafuddin's discourses, as well as the profoundly moving account of the last hours of his beloved Master.

As well as furnishing us with data about Sharafuddin, the various discourses contain reminiscences from the lips of the Master himself. This is precious material indeed. The letters of his chief disciple, Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, as well as those of Muzaffar's nephew and spiritual successor. HusainM u'izz Balkhi—who had also been a disciple of Sharafuddin's—are of great value, as are also Ḥusain's discourses, for he sometimes makes direct reference to Sharafuddin.

The historical value of this body of writing can be judged both by a study of the declared aims of the various compilers and by an assessment of the materials that have come down to us.

It would be very reassuring if the fidelity of the Prince of Compilers, Zain Badr Arabi, could be established. Consider, for example, what he writes in his preface to *The Hundred Letters*. After praying that God Almighty may grant Sharafuddin a long life as a blessing for the Muslims, he goes on to say:

> After all this praise and blessing, this unworthy slave, Zain Badr Arabi, relates how one of the disciples, Qazi Shamsuddin, the administrator of the township of Chausa, time and again presented petitions, the fundamental intention and scope of which was that, on account of the vicissitudes of fate in an unholy age, he was too far away to be able to attend the assemblies of the Master. Also, on account of his diligence in service, which necessitated the acquisition of religious and worldly knowledge, he had to miss out on much.
>
> He presented this helplessness along with his petition that something might be written, acordingc to his capacity, con-

cerning each aspect that pertained to the knowledge of the Way. This would be a source of both pleasure and profit to him.

On account of this need, the Revered Master put into writing, by means of his indulgent pen, a few lines according to what needed to be acquired so as to meet the expectations of the petitioner, with regard to the ranks and stages of the travellers, the states and affairs of the disciples, such as repentance, discipleship, belief in the Unity of God, mystical knowledge, passionate and affectionate love, turning back and going ahead, attraction and effort, servitude and service, solitude and seclusion, security and blame, spiritual guides and novices, and other similar things, in accordance with the needs of the novices and travellers, as well as stories of our predecessors which could serve both to verify and render palatable this teaching, in addition to just the slightest hint about their states and works.

At various times, from the region of Bihar, in the year 747 A.H. (AD 1346-47) he ordered them to be sent to the aforesaid township to the petitioner already mentioned. This is the collection which the servants and attendants who were present in that dwelling-place compiled from those letters, arranging them in this order so that, on the day and at the hour when grace befriends them, they might put into practice what they have read. (*100 Letters*, p. 10 of the author's translation)

Zain's deep sense of reverence for his Master makes it inconceivable that he would tamper in any way with what had flowed from "his blessed pen".

As regard the reliability of the materials, it can be pointed out, to begin with, that there is an extremely high degree of fidelity in the texts of *The Hundred Letters* that have come down to us. For example, the manuscript in the Khuda Bakhsh Library (No. 1392), which is about 430 years old, and those manuscripts used to produce the Kanpur and Lahore printed Persian texts, as well as the one used to produce a recent Urdu translation, all exemplify this fidelity. There is, of course, the

normal run of scribal errors, particularly in the sections of verse, but interpolations are almost unknown. This general accuracy is confirmed by the Balkhi manuscript of *The Hundred Letters*, by far the oldest and most accurate manuscript known, and dating possibly from the lifetime of Sharafuddin himself, or from the early fifteenth century at the very latest. This copy contains profuse marginal comments and reflections written by Muzaffar Shams Balkhi himself, thus rendering this particular manuscript all the more valuable. Sharafuddin was aware that Muzaffar was adding his own annotations. This is clear from folio 311 where we read : "The Master graciously said, 'Take down this quatrain : it is not found in *The Letters*'."

Granted Zain's fidelity in compiling Sharafuddin's letters, the question then arises about his many compilations of discourses. Let us read what he has to say in his short preface to the second such collection, known as *Khwān-i Pur Ni'mat* (A Table Laden with Good Things) :

> After the completion of the first volume of the discourses of the Master, known as *Ma'dan ul-Ma'ānī* (A Mine of Sublime Realities), there was completed from the 15th Sha'ban, 749 (8 Nov. 1348 A.D.) till the end of Shawwāl, 751 A.H. (30 Dec. 1350 A.D.) whatever came into the defective hearing and deficient understanding of this helpless one (Zain Badr Arabi).
>
> By the favour of divine Grace, either the very words themselves or their meaning has been utilized in the course of this book so that people might derive some profit from the study of its contents and be enabled to translate it into action.
>
> (*Khwān, Preface p. 2*)

He states explicitly that he has recorded either the "very words themselves or their meaning". There is no need to consider this a far-fetched claim, granted the great emphasis placed on memory work in the education system of his day.

The same point is obvious from his preface to the first collection of discourses, *Ma'dan ul-Ma'ānī*, referred to in the above quotation.

> The compiler of these discourses, which are pearls of meaning and priceless jewels, this servant of the dervishes and dust beneath their feet, is the helpless one, Zain Badr Arabi —may his sins be forgiven...—one of the attendants at the threshold of the Great Sheikh Sharafuddin Aḥmad Yaḥya Maneri...who had acquired the felicity of serving the Sheikh and of attending his esteemed assemblies. (p. 3)

He then gives a summary of what took place during the assemblies:

> Invariably, at each assembly and opportune moment, there were a number of genuine seekers, dependable disciples and loyal servants present who, with regard to their own state and what they were doing, posed difficulties and questions about the Way, requested explanations of the Law, hints about Reality, and sought the disclosure of some of the secrets about mystical knowledge. The Venerable Master, the Sheikh renowned as a nourisher of the Faith, responded to the questions raised by proferring full explanations and incomparable hints in pleasing language. (p. 3)

Of even greater interest is his careful description of the whole process of compilation:

> As far as possible, he (i.e. Zain Badr Arabi) took it down upon himself to collect what he could remember, with the aid of divine grace and the favour of the Eternal One and, as far as possible, did not fail to retain the very words. But, if on account of his own weakness and deficiency, he could not remember the actual words used, yet retained the sense of the words completely and accurately, he would, of necessity, express the meaning in appropriate language, since the purpose of language is to express meaning.
>
> Moreover, in no way or for no reason did he make any change or alteration in the meaning. If he did not remember what was said, he would leave some pages blank and, at the next opportunity, put forward his request. After he had been granted the honour of a reply, he would remember what was said and, with the concurrence of the whole assembly, put it in writing.

Even after doing all this, in order to make sure there were no mistakes or omissions, after putting together this compilation, he approached the Exalted Sheikh and personally requested him, in the honourable assembly, to go over whatever this servant, mere dust beneath the feet of the dervishes, had committed to writing.

On account of the perfection of his benevolence he complied fully with the request of this helpless one, going minutely through the material from the beginning to the end. It was read out in the assembly itself, lesson after lesson, word by word, and letter by letter. In some places where this helpless one had made a mistake while writing down what had been said, he graciously emended the error.

Sometimes, during the reading, he would add a suitable anecdote or example to confirm his teaching, or an apposite, elegant couplet or quatrain. Any proof or answer adduced in confirmation by the Venerable Master was gathered up. He himself used to explain the meaning and also have it included in this volume so that the world and mankind, by studying his excellent discourses, might attain happiness and good fortune from his blameless life. (p. 4)

Zain Badr Arabi's earnest desire to remain faithful to the teaching of the Venerable Master, as well as the painstaking steps undertaken to achieve this aim, are quite apparent from the above quotation. It is a similar sense of respect that inspired copyists down the ages to give of their best when transcribing works of the Venerable Master.

This same sense of respect is explicated by the compiler of *The Two Hundred Letters*, Sharaf Rukn (or Zain):

This servant, nothing but dust upon the threshold of the great, at the request of some of his close friends, transcribed, for their sake, some of his (i.e. Sharafuddin's) writings, whether short or lengthy, even if it was only a brief note. He considered it his bounden duty to adhere strictly to the meaning and words of whatever he transcribed. He thought it wasn't proper to allow such writings to perish.

If it were correct to allow the word of God and the Tradi-

> tions of the Prophet to perish, then only would it be fitting to allow the writings of the sheikhs to perish as well : (*200* Preface, p. 333)

The compiler, begins his preface—composed in the first half of 1368 A.D.—with an interesting observation about the fame achieved by *The Hundred Letters*. He also mentions that there were more than 200 letters in the collection made by him, which was comprised of "as many letters as I could lay my hands on". This preface begins thus:

> After the completion of a hundred letters addressed to Qazi Shamsuddin, administrator of the populous township of Chausa, and after that collection had achieved fame in both the East and the West, these excellent letters also, numbering just over two hundred, are joined to them for the renewal of those who desired and wished for them. (p. 332)

In addition to these primary materials emanating from Sharafuddin or his immediate disciples, there is one controversial work, said to be that of Sheikh Shu'aib, son of Sharafuddin's cousin, Jalaluddin. He was a young lad when Sharafuddin died. The work is controversial on two counts: its authorship and its authenticity. It could be classified as a biography. It is entitled, *Manāqib ul-Asfiyā* (The Glorious Deeds of the Saints). The very title indicates the author's bent of mind—his preoccupation with miraculous deeds. He devotes only twenty out of 152 pages in the printed text to Sharafuddin, and even this meagre treatment contains much legendary material, thus reducing its value as a reliable biography. It is, however, the first biography we know of, was produced within a few decades of his death, and does contain precious material, especially when the author is quoting from other sources. Fortunately, we can check his accuracy, for he has a long quotation from *Ma'dan ul-Ma'ānī*. The extract is a faithful reproduction, except for the omission of two sentences. This does not make any significant difference in the context. A modern author would have employed three periods to indicate that something irrelevant for this purpose has been omitted. The author also quotes explicitly from *Sirāj ul-'Ārifīn* (A Lamp for Mystics), a reputed collection of the discourses of Nizāmuddin Auliya,

which is also referred to and quoted in *Ma'dan ul-Ma'ānī*. There are other indications of his source-material from time to time, but not as explicit as in the instances just mentioned. The work has been utilized in this study, as judiciously as possible.

The material for the second and third chapters, which deal with the life and personality of Sharafuddin, is culled almost exclusively from original source materials in Persian. This does not mean that later works were not consulted. They were, but they all proved to be inadequate, for the simple reason that nobody had ever previously attempted to construct a biography of Sharafuddin which was based on a careful study of the primary sources. What one might call the "popular story" of Sharafuddin has been handed down from age to age, filled with legends, some of which are now recorded in these "stories". The outstanding exception is found in the wide-ranging and penetrating studies of Syed Ḥasan 'Askari.

The present writer has no wish to belittle the value of the body of legends associated with Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri. They form the popular expression of the average man's esteem for his sanctity, and it must not be forgotten that this esteem is very much alive, a full six centuries after his death, for he is still the most highly esteemed Muslim saint of Bihar. People flock to his tomb in Bihar Sharif and to his cave in Rajgir, especially on the occasion of his feast day celebrations. Many ask him to intercede on their behalf at the Divine Threshold, and there are stories of people who have had their prayers heard. All of this forms part and parcel of the living tradition of the venerable Makhdūm Sahib of Bihar Sharif, as he is commonly known. All of this adds weight to the central theme of this present work, but is not included in it for the simple reason that this is an historical study based on the manuscripts referred to above.

While it is true that much new material is presented here for the first time, and that the whole approach is new, it has to be stated clearly that, while it aims at being a deep study, it does not aspire to be a definitive one. The present writer hopes that his efforts will make a contribution towards the production of such a work.

Finally, it is to be hoped that this present study, by presesnting the life, personality and teaching of Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri, will prove to be yet another tribute, imperfect though it may be, to the eminent sanctity of the Venerable Master of Bihar.

PART ONE

1

The Setting

Political

Maner, the birth-place of young Aḥmad, son of Yaḥya, son of Israel, son of Maulana Muḥammad, better known as Taj Faqīh, was an important township in medieval Bihar. It lies twenty-five kilometres west of Patna and was first referred to in a Sanskrit copper-plate inscription dated AD 1126.

> The glorious lord, Govinda Chandra.. commends, informs and directs those who live in Pandali with Gunadi in the Maniyar division...Be it known to you that the village cited above with land and water, with metal-mines and salt quarries, with fish ponds, with pits and deserts, with groves and jungles of Mahua and mangoes...to the Brahman Thakkura Shri Ganeshvara Sarman...on Sunday, the 11th of the black fortnight of Jyestha in the year eleven hundred and eighty-three, in figures 1183. Obedient to my command, you shall give all dues as given now including the revenue, the trade-duties and the Turk's duty.[1]

1. Ramavatara Sarma, "Maner Copperplate of King Govinda Chandra Dev of Kanauj," *JBORS*, vol, II (1916), pp. 443-444.

Thus the copper-plate, referring to the grant of the village of Padali, in Maner (Maniyar) division, in 1126, by Govinda Chandra, the grandfather of Jayachandra, the rival of Prithviraj, contains an important reference. Does the "Turk's duty" mean that raiding parties from Ghazna came as far as Maner, or that the Kingdom of Kanauj itself was subject to attack and that the king paid a lump sum as protection-money for his entire realm? In the latter case, the duty would go to him as a separate item, as indicated here, and seems a more feasible arrangement than to talk in terms of an individual village which was offering a duty directly to the Turks.

The tradition about Taj Faqīh is that he came to Maner in response to a call for help from Momin 'Arif. He arrived there along with his sons, Isra'īl and Isma'īl, and with a band of followers who had joined him along the way, in order to capture Maner. There was an important temple in Maner at the time, for the guardian dieties are still there, *in situ*. A battle is supposed to have taken place and the graves of many martyrs who were killed during it are still indicated. A chronogram fixes the date at AH 576 (AD 1180). After some time, Taj Faqīh decided to return to the Holy Land. He advised his eldest son, Isra'īl, to remain in Maner, and told Isma'īl to cross the Ganga and preach Islam also on the northern side of this great river. It seems more likely, however, that Taj Faqīh and his band were operating under Muḥammad Bakhtiyar Khalji, who made incursions into the territory of Maner and beyond during 1197-8. As there is no specific record of his personally having captured Maner, it is possible that this was accomplished by a band of warriors led by Taj Faqīh. The chronogram mentioned cannot be used to prove anything conclusively as no ancient manuscript contains it. It could be a later fabrication.

Bakhtiyar Khalji is reported to have made a sudden dash on the fortress of Bihar after having ravaged the countryside for a year or more. This was in 1199, for there is a Sanskrit inscription from Gaya, dated 15 Jyestha, Vikramaditya Samvat 1257 (14 May, 1200), which refers to the time when "the supreme most among the kings, Shri Suratana Mojdin, was reigning for the

sake of wealth."[2] The king is undoubtedly Sultan Muizzuddin Ghori, Bakhtiyar's sovereign, as Ansari has convincingly argued.

The fortress mentioned was the *Vihār* of Odantapuri, known also as Adwand-Vihar in Muslim sources. In his account of the attack Minhaj makes several points : Most of the inhabitants were Brahmins with shaved heads (actually, Buddhist monks), most of these were slaughtered for it took some time to find anybody who could read the books found there; it was discovered that the fortress and city constituted a college, called *vihār* in Hindavi.[3] A fifteenth-century Tibetan chronicler, Taranath, says that Bakhtiyar erected a fortress on the site of Odantapuri,[4] while Dharmasvamin, a Tibetan monk who visited the area in 1234-36 refers to a Turkish officer and at least 300 troopers as being stationed in the vihār of Odantapuri.[5]

The evidence therefore indicates that Bakhtiyar Khalji stationed a garrison in what was probably the repaired fortress section referred to by Minhaj. This is supported by the fact that this area became known as Bihar after the most important vihar of the period, that of Odantapuri. The name has stuck for both the town and the modern state of Bihar. After the death of Sharafuddin the word "sharif" was added out of respect for his tomb. It was on the outskirts of the township of Bihar that Sharafuddin lived out the last forty or so years of his life. Crowds of people came to visit him there in his hospice, to attend his assemblies and listen attentively to what he had to say. It was there that he and his disciples produced a significant corpus of Persian writings which forms the principal source of the present study.

Significantly, Dharmasvamin also records how in a number of cities in north Bihar (i.e. north of the Ganga) which were

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2. H.N. Ansari, "An Inscription from Gaya of V.S. 1257 Referring to the Reign of Sultan Muizzuddin," *JBRS*, vol LII (1966), 85.
3. M. Habib and K.A. Nizami, *The Delhi Sultanat*, vol. V, Delhi, 1970, p. 173.
4. Ibid., p. 173.
5. G. Roerich (Transl). *Biography of Dharmasvāmin*, Patna, 1959 p. 93-94.

still under local Hindu rules, there was great fear and commotion because of the news of the advance of a 'Turushka' (Turkish) army. He found the people greatly perturbed in both Patala (Simraongarh) and Vaishali. In the latter city the panic was so great that the inhabitants fled early in the morning after he arrived.[6] He further records that no attack occurred at either place and that the inhabitants rejoiced greatly when they heard that the Turkish army had headed West.[7] When he reached Bodh Gaya he discovered only four monks there who told him that the rest had fled out of fear of the Turkish soldiery.[8] They themselves were so afraid that they told him of their intention of fleeing to the North, which they did the following morning, taking Dharmasvamin with them. Only seventeen days later, when they heard that the Turkish soldiers had left, did they return.[9] Shortly afterwards the Raja of Magadha, who had fled into the forest when he heard that a Turkish army was heading his way, came out on an elephant along with five hundred soldiers near Bodh Gaya where he was residing.[10]

When recording his visit to Rajgir, Dharmasvamin mentions that the town consisted of 600 houses.[11] He says nothing about Turkish soldiers but recounts how he studied many doctrines there under the renowned pundit Yashomitra.[12] In Nalanda he talks about eighty or so brick vihars, many of which had not been damaged by the Turks. Here resided the venerable Guru Rahula Shribhadra along with seventy monks and four other teachers.[13] He completed his studies with the venerable guru and then set out on his return to Tibet.

Shortly after he arrived in Nalanda for his studies an incident occurred in which a lay supporter from the vihar of Odantapuri (Bihar) sent a message warning the guru of imminent danger

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6. Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvāmin*, p. 62
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*. p. 89.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

from a Turkish officer who had taken up residence there.[14] Finally on his homeward journey two Turkish soldiers accosted him on the ferry across the Ganga and demanded gold from him. He threatened to report them to the local raja.[15]

We can draw some conclusions from these facts. The first is the evident fear, from the raja down, inspired by the Turkish soldiers. The second fact is that in spite of much evidence of movement of Turkish soldiers, except for Bihar and Maner, the rest of the province was still in the hands of the local rajas, especially north of the Ganga. It can be stated in general terms that the province of Bihar increasingly, but only gradually, came under the effective control of the Delhi Sultanate.

For our study it is important to notice who held sway over Bihar province in 1263 and during the period 1175-91. Tajuddin Arsalan Khan ruled independently over Lakhnauti (Bengal) with the title of Sultan from the time he captured it in 1259 until his death in 1265. The Barahadari inscription of Bihar reveals that he ruled over Bihar Province as well during this period.[16] This is not surprising, for Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud, the ruler in Delhi (1244-66) was under the thumb of Balban, who finally had him killed and assumed the throne himself.[17] The second period (1275-91) began with Tughril proclaiming himself independent Sultan of Bengal in 1275 and assuming the title of Sultan Mughisuddin, along with all the prerogatives of royalty.[18] In the years that followed Balban was greatly chagrined to see two of his armies defeated by Tughril. He finally decided to tackle Tughril personally. Thus it happened that, about October 1281, after the monsoon season he set off in pursuit of Tughril who had fled east of Sonargaon, a suburb of modern Dhaka. He needed the assistance of the Rai of Sonargaon in his single-minded pursuit of Tughril who had previously abandoned his capital of Lakhnauti (in West Bengal) as Balban had advanced.

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14. *Ibid.*, p. 93
15. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
16. Habib and Nizami, *The Delhi Sultanat*, p. 1141.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 274
18. *Ibid.*, p. 293

The facts seem to be as follows. Rai Danuj was king of the still-independent kingdom of Sonargaon. Balban had only one object in marching all the way from Delhi in his old age—to kill or capture Tughril who had had the effrontery to declare himself independent. In order to achieve his purpose he needed the assistance of the Rai of Sonargaon, for he wished to control the labyrinthine waterways of East Bengal and prevent Tughril's escape. Hence he sought an interview with the Rai. The Rai came out to meet him in his camp. The Rai formally agreed to comply with Balban's request for assistance.[19]

Tughril was in fact killed, and early in 1282 Balban was accompanied back to Lakhnauti by his son, Bughra Khan, whom he appointed governor of Lakhnauti and urged to subdue Sonargaon and Satgaon.[20] This instruction is yet another piece of evidence of the hitherto independent status of Sonargaon. Bughra Khan remained governor of Lakhnauti until September 1287. He was rather fond of the good life and we can safely assume he did not much exert himself to carry out his father's order to annex Sonargaon to the East. After Balban's death in September 1287 Bughra Khan assumed the title of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud. Early the following year he moved west and occupied Bihar. He then moved on towards Awadh. Sultan Kaiqubad, his son, marched out from Delhi. A meeting took place between the father and son but no battle occurred. One consequence was that Bihar remained under Nasiruddin's control. It remained under the Bengal sultanate until the advent of the Tughluqs. There is no evidence of any thrust towards Sonargaon during Nasiruddin's reign. He abdicated in 1290 and his more energetic son, Kaikaus, reigned from 1291-1301. It seems much

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19. J. Sarkar (Edit.), *The History of Bengal*, vol. II (Dacca, 1948 and 1972), pp. 59, 64-67.
Barani's narrative is straight forward and devoid of legendary accretions. He writes : "Balban arrived at the frontier territory of Sonargaon (dar hudūd-i Sonargaon). Rai Danuj was the ruler of Sonargaon and he met the Sultan there (ān jā, i.e. near the frontier, not in Sonargaon itself). The Sultan entered into an agreement ('ahad nāma) with Danuj Rai of Sonargaon." Barani, *Tārīkh*-i *Fīrūz Shāhī*, Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1862, p. 87.

20. *The History of Bengal*, p. 71.

more likely that Sonargaon was subjugated during his reign.[21] Kaikaus was succeeded by Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz Shah who reigned over Bengal and Bihar from 1301 until his death in 1322[22]. Up till the present time the history of both Bihar and Bengal during these two decades has been constructed largely upon numismatic evidence. This is not very satisfying. The major problem is the dual issue of coins, especially by Sultan Shamsuddin and his fiery son Bahadur Shah.[23] From 1324 till 1338 both Bihar and Bengal came under the control of Delhi; the former remained so for the remainder of Sharafuddin's lifetime while the latter gained independence in 1338. There will be occasion to refer to this political setting when attempting to construct a chronology of Sharafuddin's early years

In our primary source material we find a number of references to the political set-up of Bihar in the mid-fourteenth century. We find, for example, mention of a deputy-governor (nā'ib) to Majd ul-Mulk called Khwaja Khizr (*Ma'dan* 48, p. 378). Khwaja Mahmud Awaz, the revenue officer (mushrif) of the province of Bihar, is mentioned (*Ma'dan* 36, p. 298). Not only did outlying places like Chausa have a local administrator (hākim) in the person of Qazi Shamsuddin, but also Bihar, in the person of Qazi Mu'inuddin (hākim-i Bihar), who was present in one of the assemblies along with the governor, Majd ul-Mulk (*Ma'dan* 44, p.352).

Ordinary Life

Amidst the political events outlined above the ordinary citizen was trying his best to live peacefully. The difficulties experienced by urban dwellers whose towns were the frequent target of attack, or by farmers whose lands happened to lie in the path of an advancing army, were considerable. Fear of the Turkish

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21. Habib and Nizami, *The Delhi Sultanat*, pp. 1144-5. Another reason for this later date, in preference to AD 1282-91, is the fact that the first coin known to have been minted in Sonargaon is dated 705 A.H. (AD 1305-6). Karim, A., *Corpus of the Muslim Coins of Bengal*, p. 158.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 1145-6.
23. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 80-81.

soldiery has already been mentioned. Later, there was a similar panic among both Muslim and Hindu inhabitants when an army advanced towards their town. Maner, for example, was in great commotion in 1353 at the advance of the Bengal army under Sultan Ilyas Shah. Sharafuddin refers to this in a letter, probably written to Qazi Shamsuddin of Chausa :

> Dear Brother Shamsuddin, peace ! It has come to my hearing that you have arrived back from Delhi and that you have had much to suffer, and that the army from Bengal has aroused much perturbation in the township of Maner (*200 Letters* 25, p. 397).

The ordinary life of the inhabitants of Maner and of the surrounding countryside was influenced by many other factors as well. The first of these was geographical in nature. Maner of today is situated two kilometres south of the Ganga and one kilometre to the east of the old Sone and ten kilometres to the east of the Sone river of today. In Babur's time, according to calculations he made when he visited Maner in 1528, it lay eight kilometres south of the Ganga and one kilometre to the east of the Sone[24]. It is not known exactly where it lay in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in relation to the changing beds of the Ganga and Sone rivers. It was, however, basically a confluence settlement. The rich alluvial soil was excellent for agricultural purposes. From mid-April until mid-June or so, the summer heat would cross the 40° mark, but would abate with the arrival of the monsoon, usually late in June. The rainy season would continue until the end of September, bringing more than forty inches of rain with it. Flooding was a problem, but it did serve the purpose of depositing yet more layers of rich alluvial soil. Shortly before the arrival of the monsoon the high temperatures, in addition to the rising humidity, would make for unpleasantly oppressive weather. This would also be true for the days and nights during the monsoon when the rain stopped and there was no breeze. October, and particularly November, are glorious months, while December and January

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24. A.S. Beveridge (Transl), *The Bābur-nāma in English* (London, 1969), pp. 666-7.

can be cold of a night, even as low as 2° C., but the days are normally bright and sunny, with an average maximum of 22°C. February is a transitional month and by March it is beginning to warm up. In medieval times, rice-growing during the monsoon and the cultivation of various types of pulses as a winter crop formed the basic agricultural pattern. Intimately associated with the annual cycle were a number of festivals, especially those of October, and the socially important marriage-season, usually coinciding with the summer months.

Much of this local Hindu pattern of life was adopted and followed by the Muslims in Maner, with the exception of the feasts. These followed the uncorrected lunar calendar observed by the Muslims and were thus divorced from any particular season. They rotated throughout the year in sharp contrast to the seasonal nature of the Hindu festivals, also lunar in character, but based on a self-correcting calendar to keep in step with the solar year.

During the thirteenth century the caste system had a tight grip on Hindu society, as is illustrated by an incident narrated by Dharmasvamin, who tells us that, while fording a river

> he was carried away by the current towards the opposite bank but noticed a man of dark complexion standing on the bank and shouted to him, 'Save me from the river!' The man shouted back, 'I am of low caste,' and he did not help him.[25]

He went on to add that

> it was improper for a man of low caste to touch with his hands a person of high caste. If a person of low caste were to look at a person of high caste eating, the food had to be thrown away.[26]

The incident shows how thoroughly indoctrinated the untouchables were, even to the point of refusing to lend a hand to save a drowning man because touching him was prohibited.

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25. Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvāmin*, p. 15.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

The biography of Dharmasvamin also reveals the ease with which an extremely learned man like himself could believe all sorts of stories about extraordirary miraculous events associated with many images in the Bodh Gaya and Nalanda areas. This credulity adds an eerie atmosphere to what is otherwise a very straightforward and accurate narrative. It also serves as an indication of the credulity of the Hindu and Buddhist populace. It would be unhistorical, however, to imagine that this attitude was confined to adherents of these two religions. It was more a feature of medieval times, shared by the masses of other faiths as well. This has to be taken into account in the perusal of Sufi writings, especially those not actually penned by a famous Sufi himself.

When Sharafuddin was in Rajgir the number of Muslims in comparison to Hindus was still small. It would be interesting to discover if there were still some Buddhists there, several decades after the situation described by Dharmasvamin in 1234-6. Rajgir and its environs are important for Jains, especially since Mahavir died not far from the town, about 468 BC.[27] In view of the fact of the manifold religious associations of Rajgir, it would be of considerable interest to find out something about the relationships of the members of these great religions. We shall notice what our monk, Dharmasvamin, has to say on the topic, for the situation could not have changed drastically over a few decades. Doctrinally, there were obvious differences, and these were discussed. For example, Dharmasvamin objected to the sacrifice of animals as a means to achieve salvation : "This method of sacrifice is not the way of attaining emancipation, though it is claimed to be one."[28] He went on to criticize some other teachings which he considered to be heretical. These differences should not surprise us, for Buddhism itself had its different doctrines. A Hinayana Celyonese monk urged Dharmasvamin to throw his heretical Mahayana book into the river when he arrived at Bodh Gaya.[29] Of greater signficance are pieces of information which indicate an ability

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27. A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India* (Delhi; 1971), p. 290.
28. Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvāmin* p. 96.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

to recognize and appreciate the good in others. For example, Dharmasvamin, a follower of Mahayana, says that the Indian adherents of Hinayana are more kind than his Tibetan co-religionists.[30] Raja Ramsinha of Pattala, a Hindu, invited him, a Buddhist monk, to be his chaplain.[31] The chief supporter of the renowned Buddhist scholar of Nalanda, Rahula Shribadra, was a Brahmin called Jayadeva.[32] The evidence leads us to believe that people were honoured more for their deep learning and personal holiness than for the particular doctrines they happened to hold.

In many of the simple pleasures of life there was no dividing line. Betel leaves, to which were added the ashes of burnt cowries and a little scent,[33] were popular with one and all. People also used the same cowrie shells as small coins.[34]

Along with Turkish soldiers and administrators came a group of Muslims of particular interest to us—the Sufis. The Suhrawardi Order arrived on the scene very early through the influence of Sheikh Taqiuddin of Mahsun in Bengal, the author of *Multaqāt* (Meeting Places), a digest of Ghazzali's *Iḥyā 'ulūm ud-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences). He was the spiritual guide of Yahya Maneri, the father of Sharafuddin, and also of Sulaiman Langarzamin of Kako (near Jahanabad, Gaya District, Bihar), his uncle. We also notice Sharafuddin's maternal grandfather, Shihabuddin Jagjot of Jethuli (Patna District). This shows that the Suhrawardis must have arrived in Bihar quite early in the thirteenth century. Sharafuddin's first cousin, Ahmad Charmposh of Amber (Bihar Sharif), a disciple of Alauddin Charmposh of Puraini (Bhagalpur) a poet of merit, was also a Suhrawardi. The father of Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, a disciple of Ahmad Charmposh, was another Suhrawardi.[35] The

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30. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
33. *Ibid.*, p, 97.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
35. and 36. S.H. Askari, *Paper for History of Bihar* (typescript), Khuda Bakhsh Library, Patna, pp. 6 and 4.

Chishtis were also in Bihar before the end of the thirteenth century: Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya, for example, speaks of a certain Sheikh Khizr Paradoz who had established a Chishti hospice in Bihar and had invited him to visit it. He was unable to do so.[36] It was Maulana Nizamuddin Maula, a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya's, who coaxed Sharafuddin to come to Bihar town. Also mentioned along with Nizamuddin Maula was a group of fellow Chishtis. Another Chishti whose name should be mentioned was Ibrahim Chishti who lies buried in Hajipur.[37] It was Sharafuddin who introduced the Firdausi Order in Bihar, to whom its success there is largely due.

A few details from the discourses of Sharafuddin himself will throw into clearer relief the practices and mentality of the Muslims of the age. A little Muslim boy's first lesson was an important step in his life. We have a delightful sketch of how one such boy took his first lesson from none other than the Master of the World, (Makhdūm-i Jahān, i.e. Sharafuddin Maneri).

Qazi Ashrafuddin brought along his sister's small son and said that this was the day on which his nephew should begin his studies. He wanted him to have his first lesson from the Master himself, whom he requested to write the first letters on the lad's wooden slate. The Venerable Master acceded to his request. He picked up the slate and wrote the Arabic equivalent of ABCD. He then taught these four letters to the lad, instructing him to begin his lesson, 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.' The little fellow repeated the words in full. He then taught him the four letters. The lad repeated each of the letters after the Venerable Master, imitating him exactly. Afterwards he said, 'God be praised' and prayed thus for him : 'May the Glorious God Most High make you a scholar:' Afterwards he added : 'Having begun with the ABC, where are the limits to which you can be raised ?' The Venerable Master took a small cake and a few sweets and began to feed the

37. Askari, Paper for History of Bihar, Khuda Bakhsh Library, Patna, p.5.

little boy, saying 'Permit me to be of service to you !' *Ma'dan* 6, p. 42)

The incident would have occurred when the boy was four years, four months and four days old. In passing, we notice how gracious Sharafuddin was in his dealings with the young lad.

Casuistry, good in itself, could be put to bad use, as the following words of the Master clearly indicate :

> The Venerable Master said : 'Without doubt the wordly scholars of today are responsible for the advent of much deception for, as soon as some work crops up, they try to think up some subtefuge or way out. They utilize their knowledge in order to twist out of their obligations. For example, when clever people have to pay a tax for the poor, some of them resort to trickery to escape doing so. They place their offering in silver upon a tray and then put some grain over the top, thus filling the tray with the grain. Then they give it to some poor person. When he takes the tray, they say to him, 'We have need of this grain,' and buy back the tray for a few silver coins. They thus get their silver back, as well as pay the tax for the poor.' (*Ma'dan* 42, p. 342)

Prostration and kissing the ground were part of the ritual in greeting sheikhs as well as kings :

> Sheikh Ahmad Diwali and his brother Zakaria had travelled down from Delhi and kissed the ground in front of the Venerable Master. He said to them, 'Dear friends, where have you come from ?' They replied, 'From the city of Delhi.' He added, 'May your coming prove beneficial!' (*Ma'dan* 54, p. 427)

One of the many customs observed at the birth of a child is recorded :

> An esteemed one said : 'When a child is born someone recites the call to prayer in its ear. Where does this custom originate from ?' The Venerable Master replied : 'It comes from apostolic tradition that, in the left ear, someone says

"God is great' and, in the right, the call to prayer is sounded.' (*Ma'dan* 59 pp. 457-8).

Some people came to the mosque barefooted for prayer :

Maulana Karimuddin observed that some people were coming barefooted for prayer. He enquired if that was fitting. He replied : 'It is acceptable. One does not become polluted by a little dust on one's feet. If he picks it up on his way to prayer it cannot be deemed polluting. The root of purity lies in things, for some of the Companions used to come barefooted to the mosque for prayer.' (*Khwān* 6, pp. 12-13)

People were very interested in the interpretation of dreams. The topic frequently came up for discussion in the assemblies. Here is one example of the style of interpretation offered :

Qazi Ashrafuddin asked for the interpretation of a dream in which an animal attacks a person. He answered thus : 'It is to be noticed whether the animal overpowers him or not. If it overcomes him, then the quality which is associated with that particular animal has mastered him. This is because all the qualities of the various animals have been thus interpreted. For example, if someone dreams that a tiger is attacking him and overcomes him, the interpretation would be that violent anger has mastered him, for that quality is exemplified by tigers and dogs. Similarly, if someone dreams about a fox, it would indicate fawning and flattery, for foxes are noted for such behaviour. On the other hand, a dream concerning a leopard would indicate that pride has mastered him, for pride and rebellion are associated with leopards. Anyone who dreams about a pig is sunk in lust and filth.' (*Khwān* 14, pp. 37-8)

We learn that people were bitten by snakes and because antidotes were frequently unavailable quickly enough to save a victim living in a rural area, people would try any form of cure—including the following as related by Sharafuddin.

When somebody is bitten by a snake it is said that a particular Quranic verse (Q. 20 : 19-20) should be read and, breathing three times over some water, it should be given to

the person to drink. It is important that at least a drop should enter his throat. (*Khwān* 20, p. 56)

The month of Rajab had many traditions associated with it. invariably fabricated, as Al-Saghani insisted,[38] and as here confirmed by Sharafuddin :

Someone said, 'How is it that today is a special day for begging assistance from God'. ? The Master said : 'I haven't seen it written anywhere in reliable books. Yet there is a story about a woman called Maryam in a certain city whose son had disappeared. He was imprisoned by the king. His mother was weeping and lamenting all the time on account of this separation. There was a renowned holy man in the city. One day, the woman went to him and narrated her whole story to him. It was the month of Rajab. The holy man said : 'In two or three days it will be the fifteenth of the month of Rajab. That should be a day of fast and intercession". The woman did as she was bidden. It so happened that on the completion of the prayer freedom was granted to the prisoner.....This has been related as a story, but I have not seen it in any reliable work or among the traditions.' (*Khwān* 36, pp 84-5)

Little children were brought along for special blessings at the hands of holy men :

Qazi Minhajuddin brought both his sons to the Venerable Master to kiss the Master's feet. With his own blessed hand the Master placed a cap on the head of each. The Helpless One (i.e. Zain Badr Arabi) asked : 'When these two grow up, will they have to pledge allegiance and accept discipleship again ? Will this suffice or not ?' He answered : 'No, they are under no obligation : they have not yet attained the age of reason. This cap signifies the invocation of a blessing for an abundance of mercy and favour upon them.' (*Khwān* 37, p. 93)

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38. M. Ishaq, *India's Contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature* (Bangladesh, 1976), p. 226.

We have a sampling of superstitutions current at the time, and it is instructive to notice what people were afraid of :

> The Venerable Master said : 'I have seen so many things that have cropped up among the Muslims. Formerly they were disapproved of. Where did they arise from ? At any rate, they end up becoming common practice. For example, women won't burn garlic or onion peelings inside the house. I was astonished when confronted with this, wondering where it came from. Finally I discovered that such burning was thought to induce poverty. I also heard that one should not sit in the doorway. This I also found astonishing, wondering why people said this. I learnt that this too was considered a practice that led to poverty. I also heard that they do not sweep the house of a night, again out of fear of poverty'. (*Khwān* 43, p. 113)

It can be remarked, in passing, that these very same practices are still observed in a number of Muslim households in Bihar to this very day.

Two practices are mentioned in an assembly held on 30 July 1359 (*Ganj-i-lā Yafnā*, 4 Ram. A.H. 760 p. 21). One was a horrible way of testing whether a woman was a witch or not—by immersing her in water. The other was to discover if a man was a thief or not. This was done—and still is in some places in Bihar—by revolving a spouted water-pot after having recited the Quranic chapter *Yasin* over some rice, in the belief that the rice would then stick to the mouth of the thief. Sharafuddin could not tolerate these practices : 'These are idle words : They don't prove anything at all'.

There are many references to feasts which played, and still do, an important role in finding meaning in life. Here is one such example :

> Husamuddin, Haibat Khan's prayer-leader, said : 'Tonight is the fourteenth night of Sha'bān, the night of the Divine Decree (Shab-i Barāt). Whatever lies in store for the kingdom for the whole year is made manifest and must inevitably come to pass, such as the Angel to Death, if in-

formed that so-and-so, on Sunday, after the noontide prayer, is to be taken from this perishable abode to one which is everlasting.' (*Khwān* 25, p. 66)

The following incident indicates that marriages then, as now, were occasions of extravagant spending :

The topic of the dower given to girls arose. The army commander for the province, Ali Usman, one of the disciples, was present. The Master turned towards him and said : 'How much did you pay at your son's marriage ?' He replied, '40,000 silver pieces.' He exclaimed, 'God be praised ! Matters have gone to this extent.' (He then related how the Caliph, Harun ul-Rashid, ordered his daughter's dower to be fixed at 100 gold coins fewer than the number of the Prophet's daughter, Fatima.) Afterwards he smilingly said, 'When your son has a daughter, people will say that her mother fetched 40,000 silver pieces.' (*Baḥr* 16 Hij, p. 88).

There is a reference to a custom which Sharafuddin approved of—the use of vermilion by Muslim women. This is applied to the head where the hair is parted and indicates that a woman is married. The question was treated in an assembly:

Some one said that he had read that Muslim women who apply vermilion to their heads are infidels. Many women question how this could be true. The Venerable Master replied. 'It has to be ascertained why infidel women apply vermilion to their heads. Do they do so to beautify themselves, or as an expression of their religion ? If it is to adorn themselves, then this is not infidelity. Only if it is prescribed by their religion can it be infidelity..... There are very many things which the infidels do and we do too, such as eating, drinking, walking, wearing clothes, talking and many other things in which there is no infidelity. Applying vermilion to the head falls into this category'. (*Mūnis* 12, p. 24).

One can observe that many married Muslim women in Bihar still make use of vermilion to indicate their marital status, just as Hindu women do.

It is very striking that six centuries after the death of Sharafuddin Maneri many of the practices referred to are still in vogue. The deeper one's acquaintance with the lives of ordinary people the more one becomes aware of the deep-rooted nature of traditional beliefs and practices, among Hindus as well as Muslims. Their basic attitude to life is still very much in tune with that of their forebears in fourteenth-century Bihar.

2

Life

Birth

Sharafuddin's father Yahya was born in Maner to Israel, son of Maulana Muhammad known as Taj Faqih who was reputed to be the first Muslim to have brought the Maner area under Turkish control. Whatever be the warrior status of his great-grandfather, Sharafuddin's own father Yahya Maneri was revered for his upright life. He led an exemplary life under the guidance of the Suhrawardi Sufi Sheikh Taqiuddin of Mahsum in Bengal. His wife Bibi Razia[1] was also under the influence of another renowned Suhrawardi Sufi—her own father Shihabuddin Jagjot of Jethuli near Patna.

The first son to be born to Yahya Maneri and Bibi Razia was Khaliluddin.[2] Then came Ahmad who was later given the title of Sharafuddin. Next came Jaliluddin,[3] while the fourth brother is said to have been Habibuddin. Sharafuddin also had at least one sister for there is a reference to her son Jamaluddin

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1. Zamiruddin, *Sirat ush-Sharaf*, p. 42.
2. *Wafāt Nāma.*
3. **Idem.**

as his sister's son (Khwāhar zāda, *Mukhkh* 79, p. 77). There is another reference to her in the same work (41, p. 115) : 'After the Festival Prayer, Sharafuddin went to the illustrious grave of his sister.' There is a further reference to the death of Maulana Zainuddin, 'son of the Venerable Master's sister' (Ṣafar, photostat, K.B.O.P.L., p. 88).

There are legends associated with both Sharafuddin's birth and early childhood. This is to be expected, for popular imagination is fertile. Thus for example, Khwaja Khizr, Islam's most revered legendary figure, is seen rocking the babe's cradle. The sober truth is that young Ahmad grew up in one of those wholesome Muslim households where saintly parents set a good example for children who naturally imbibe their parents' piety. From childhood Sharafuddin experienced what it was like to be in a group of people whose main concern was to honour God and obey His commands, all the while seeking to draw as close to Him as possible. Coupled with this goes a sense of one's duties to one's fellows, 'God's creatures', (Khalq-i Khudā). Obviously Sharafuddin experienced the loving concern of his parents and the joys associated with brothers and sisters in a household such as the one presided over by his father Yahya. He thus had an excellent grounding for his future life.

When we turn our attention to the date of his birth, we are confronted with a puzzling fact. Granted that he died in AH 782 (AD 1381)—which is incontestable—it is surprising to find no voice raised to query the traditional date of Sharafuddin's birth, Sha'ban, AH 661 (1263) (the last Friday of the month is usually given as the day)[4], even though this would make him 121 lunar or 117 solar years old when he died. The only evidence proferred in *Sīrat ush-Sharaf* (A Noble Life) is a chronogram[5] for which no ancient authority is vouchafed. The author goes on to say that the birth occurred while Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud was ruling in Delhi (1246-66) and lavishes praise upon this sultan for his piety.

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4. Zamiruddin, *Sirat ush-Sharaf*, p. 40.
5. Idem.

'Another important date given in *Sīrat ush-Sharaf* and universally accepted is that of the death of Sheikh Yahya, Sharafuddin's father. It is 11 Sha'ban, AH 690 (9 August 1291). Couplets from two authorities are quoted in proof of this date.[6] Yet another important date is that of the death of Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi, the spiritual guide whom Sharafuddin met and was moved to follow in Delhi. The date given in *Sīrat ush-Sharaf* and generally accepted is AH 691 1292).[7]

There are insurmountable difficulties involved in accepting these dates.

Basing ourselves on the evidence to be presented in the next section to establish the fact that Sharafuddin was in Sonargaon from at least 1305 until 1322, it is clearly impossible for Najibuddin to have died in 1292. The only other date given for his death is AH 733 (1332-33)[8]. We have an invaluable piece of evidence to corroborate this date, found at Najibuddin's tomb and recorded in the early twenties by the Archeological Survey of India.[9] Here we find a description of the tomb of Najibuddin Firdausi, near modern Mehrauli, close to the Qutb Minar in Delhi, with the death inscription, 'Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi, may the mercy of God be upon him, 733'. This is reported to be a modern inscription and is found, 'on a red sandstone tablet fixed in the northern wall of the enclosure surrounding the grave.' A visitor today will find a white marble inscription above the grave with the date, '13th Muharram, 733.' (5 October, 1332). This is the correct date.

In order to arrive at a date for Sharafuddin's birth we have to argue back from his arrival in Sonargaon. As a reasoned hypothesis we could hold that this town was flourishing by 1304, shortly after Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz Shah brought Sylhet under his control in 1303, using Sonargaon as a base. He was able to turn his mind to building up his eastern capital, Sonar-

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6. Idem, p. 53.
7. Idem, p. 59.
8. Sarwar, *Khazīnat ul-Aṣfiyā*, Part II, pp. 287-8
9. *List of Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments of the Delhi Province*, Archeological Survey of India, 1920's, vol. III, p. iii, entry no. 185.

gaon, and encouraging learning by providing the needed buildings and remuneration for scholars. He also had a firm grip over both Bengal and Bihar. In other words, there was enough to attract a renowned scholar like Abu Tau'ama to Sonargaon, especially if he was experiencing difficulties in Delhi. It is worth while reflecting on Zamiruddin's report that Sharafuddin was born in the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud. If Zamiruddin's statement is based on some later authority who simply looked up who was the reigning sultan in Delhi in 1263, then it adds nothing to the argument. On the other hand if it represents an oral tradition—and this is more likely—then it is instructive to recall that Bihar was under Sultan Tajuddin Arsalan Khan of Lakhnauti at this time (1259-65), not under Delhi at all. On the other hand it was under Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud of Lakhnauti from 1287 until 1291 which, granted that Sharafuddin was a teenager of about fourteen when he went to Sonargaon, and that he did so about 1304 (as shown in the following section), then this is precisely when we would expect him to have been born. We should also advert to the fact that Bihar in the centuries preceding the Turkish conquest was mainly under the Palas or Senas of Bengal, not under Delhi. The political perspective of the people of Bihar at this period was focused on Bengal, not Delhi. It is also an age-old custom to date events according to the reign in which they occurred. This is the method used by Luke, for example, to date the birth of Jesus (Luke 2, 1-2). Hence, 1290 could be taken as an educated guess at the year of Sharafuddin's birth.

There is an autobiographical reference to the early years in Maner which throws a ray of light upon an otherwise dark period. Sharafuddin was giving a lesson when he had occasion to enquire if anybody knew which chapter of the Quran a particular verse come from. Nobody remembered where it came from. This gave rise to the following reminiscence.

> Neither do I recall its place at the moment. When I was a child, I was forced to memorize several books, such as *Maṣādir* (Verbal Nouns) and *Miftāḥ ul-Lughāt*, (*A key to Words*). Sections of books and even twenty sections of *Miftāh ul-Lughāt*, to the measure of one volume, had to be

learned by heart. They were checked by having us recite them in full. How I wish they had forced me to learn the Quran by heart instead of those books ! (*Ma'dan* 6, p. 43).

He deeply regrets having lost the opportunity of memorizing the Quran as a child (dar ayyām-i khōrdagī), obviously referring to his pre-adolescent period spent in Maner.

Little more can be said about this early period, until a visitor arrived in Maner on his way from Delhi to Sonargaon (part of modern Dhaka). This visit was to change the whole course of Sharafuddin's life.

The Sonargaon Period

The only information that has so far come to light about the move to Sonargaon is found in the biographical work referred to in the introduction, *Manāqib ul-Aṣfiyā*. Sharafuddin's biographer writes thus :

I have heard that, by the time he reached maturity, he was engrossed in religious studies and had acquired mastery over the religious sciences. At that time the great renown, eminence and learning of Maulana Sharafuddin (i.e. Tau'ama) had spread not only throughout the length and breadth of India, but also in Arabia and Persia. He had complete mastery over all branches of learning, including chemistry, enchantments and fortune-telling. He was one of the most outstanding religious scholars. Common people and the nobility, lords and kings, all were devoted, obedient and submissive to him. He used to show astonishing things to the people from his knowledge of fortune-telling. (*Manāqib* p. 131).

The biographer, writing in one of the early decades of the fifteenth century, says that Sharafuddin "had acquired mastery over the religious sciences" ('ulūm-i din bekamāl ḥāsil kard) by the time he had reached adolescence (chūn bebalāghat rasīd). We have already noticed Sharafuddin's own words about his early education in Maner. It occurred in his childhood and consisted mainly of memory work. The most obvious conclu-

sion to draw is that he left for Sonargaon after his childhood, when he had become an adolescent. He was probably a youngster of fourteen years at the time.

His biographer greatly exaggerates both Sharafuddin's own educational accomplishment at this early stage of his scholastic career, as well as the fame of his teacher. All Sharafuddin had at the time was the fruit of his memorizing work, plus reading and writing. There was no question at all of mastery of the religious sciences at this age. Besides, if it were true, what was the point of going to Sonargaon ?

> His biographer goes on to inform us that
> The King of Delhi grew afraid of the extent of his influence over the people, thinking he might capture the kingdom. Artfully, he sent the Maulana to Sonargaon. At that time, the realm of Bengal was under the control of the king of Delhi (idem).

This piece of information needs careful scrutiny, and it should be recalled that the biographer was writing in the early fifteenth century. If Sharafuddin had been born in 1263 A.D., as people believe, this would mean that the author was referring to a journey to Sonargaon in 1276 A.D., more or less, an event that took place more than a century and a quarter previously. One would need a certain grounding in history in order to be able to write with accuracy after such a lapse of time—something his biographer did not possess. Balban was the Sultan of Delhi from 1266 to 1287 A.D. Hence some writers have identified him as the unnamed King.[10] It is surprising that any historian could calmly accept that Balban—of all people—could have grown afraid of a religious scholar and consider him as a potential rival to his throne! No reference to this effect is found in the standard chronicles of his reign. It is common knowledge, however, that Balban's ruthlessness inspired fear and terror among one and all. He would not be in the least bothered about a theologian as a possible rival.

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10. S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, p. 228.

There is another difficulty. Sonargaon, at this time, was not under the Delhi Sultanate, nor had it ever been. It was still bring ruled by a Hindu King, Danuj Rai, whom Balban met at the end of 1281 A.D. in the frontier territory of Sonargaon. We have seen how Barani reports the agreement reached to ensure that Tughril, who had proclaimed himself independent of Balban, should not escape. It can further be stated, with considerable confidence, that Sonargaon was not subjected before Balban's death in 1287 A.D. and, most likely, not until the last decade of the century by Sultan Ruknuddin Kaikaus (1291-1301 A.D.) or, possibly, the beginning of the next, by Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz Shah (1301-22 A.D.). The earliest known coin from the Sonargaon mint, 705 A.H. (1305 A.D.), indicates a later, rather than an earlier, occupation.

There is every reason for agreeing with Qunungo's argument that the thrust to Sylhet, in 1303 A.D., would have been a logical move after the subjugation of Sonargaon, which would have been the natural base for such an operation.[11]

Hence, there can be no possibility of a journey made by Maulana Abu Tau'ama and Sharafuddin to a Turkish-controlled Sonargaon anywhere near 1276 A.D.—or for another fifteen years, at the very least. Moreover, Tughril had proclaimed himself independent in 1275 A.D., so Bengal was not under Delhi at the time either. On the other hand, the postulated date of birth—circa 1290 A.D.—would have Sharafuddin going to Sonargaon about 1304 A.D., by which time Sonargaon was well and truly under Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz Shah.

Sharafuddin's biographer goes on to relate how Maulana Tau'ama reached Maner and was visited by young Ahmad, who was impressed by his knowledge. He said to himself that it would not be possible to investigate the religious sciences except in the service and company of such an investigator of reality.

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11. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 79.

> He requested that he be allowed to attend upon the Maulana. When the Maulana saw his capability, sincere behaviour and piety, he was very pleased indeed
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> He said, "For someone like this, every effort should be made to help him and assist him to make progress in the religious sciences."
>
> Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri, with the approval of his parents, went along with Maulana Ashrafuddin to Sonargaon. (*Manāqib*, p. 131)

According to this account, Sharafuddin's father was still alive when he set out. Clearly, he could not have died in 1291 A.D., as stated by Zamirundin.[12]

Although it requires considerable patience, we can piece together the scattered items of information concerning Sonargaon which can be gleaned from a study of the original Persian source materials. Most of these items are in the form of personal reminiscences which occurred, over a period of years, as Sharafuddin was imparting spiritual teaching to those fortunate enough to be present in the assemblies held regularly in his Sufi centre on the outskirts of Bihar town. It is the occasional nature of these reminiscences—as opposed to the studied account of Ibn Battuta's travels, for example—that enhances their value. The Sheikh's whole attention is devoted to teaching and the reminiscence is narrated in order to help illustrate his point. His attention is on his teaching, not on himself. It is also taken for granted that a man of his spiritual stature would be incapable of deliberately distorting the truth. Added to this we have to remark that he possessed a wonderfully retentive memory, as is abundantly clear from his writings and recorded discourses. We can conveniently study his reminisences under two headings : (a) political and (b) personal.

Political Reminiscences

Shamsuddin Firuz Shah, the Sultan of Bengal, from 1301 to

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12. Zamiruddin, *Sirat ush-Sharaf*, p. 53.

1322 A D., features prominently in Sharafuddin's reminiscences. He was most probably the capable and energetic governor of Bihar, Firuz Aitigin, who captured the throne of Lakhnauti in 1301 A D. The political history of Bengal during his reign is largely constructed on the basis of numismatic evidence, resulting in some unresolved problems. In this context, the following conversation, recalled by Sharafuddin in 1373 A.D., and recorded in *Mūnis ul-Murīdin*, (*A Companion for Novices*) is of considerable interest. The conversation was between Sultan Firuz Shah and his prime minister, Arsalan Khan. The topic of the conversation was the Sultan's sons, Hatim Khan and Bahadur Shah. The Venerable Master related the following :

> Some time ago, there was a king in Sonargaon called Shamsuddin Firuz Shah. He had a vizir called Arsalan Khan. One day the king summoned him and said : "I have a question to ask you. If you are prepared to give me an honest answer, I shall ask it." The vizir promised to give him such an answer. The Sultan said : "I have two sons, one is Hatim Khan, who is in the town of Bihar, while the other, Bahadur Shah, is in Kamru. Tell me, which of these two is fit for kingship ?"
>
> The vizir replied : "You have ordered me to give a straight answer, and so I shall. Neither of them is fit for kingship."
>
> The king was not at all pleased to hear this. He asked his vizir for an explanation.
>
> He replied : "Hatim Khan is generous, merciful and patient, while Bahadur Shah is tyrannical, powerful and very touchy. The former lacks strength of will, while the latter is bereft of clemency. The former fails to inspire awe, while the latter lacks mildness. The former is insensitive to his own dignity, while the latter shows no mercy. This is why both are unfit for kingship."
>
> It turned out as the vizir had said. When Sultan Shamsuddin died, Bahadur Shah acquired sovereignty over Kamru, while Hatim Khan proclaimed himself as independent Sultan over Bihar. The latter ruined his country through his excessive clemency and mildness, while the former was removed

from exercising sovereignty because of his tyranny and compulsion. Hence it is true that the exercise of sovereignty requires both kinds of qualities so that the kingdom may remain stable and the dignity of sovereignty may be made manifest. (*Mūnis* 10, pp. 17-18)

Inscriptions confirm that Hatim Khan was governor of Bihar both in 1309 and 1315 A.D.[13] We presume he was appointed shortly after his father gained the throne in 1301, while the above quotation shows that he was still governing the province in 1322, when Shamsuddin died. There are coins bearing the name of Bahadur Shah that were issued from Lakhnauti, beginning in the year 1310 A.D.[14] Hence it is likely that the discussion occurred after that year, if the word 'Shah' has any significence in the conversation quoted above. Many of Bahadur's coins were discovered in Cooch Bihar,[15] the southern gateway to Assam. It lies south-west of the portion of Assam still known today as Kamrup, which lies to the east of the Manas river. The above conversation obviously took place in Sonargaon. One has the impression that the conversation took place during a semi-public audience, and Sharafuddin was himself present, for he gives a very detailed account of it, some sixty years later. The clear reference to this style of governing of both sons indicates that they had been administering their respective provinces for some time. There is ample evidence to show that Sultan Shamsuddin himself had the blend of severity and generosity recommended by Arsalan Khan, otherwise his statement would have been an indirect criticism of the Sultan. This would have been most indiscreet on his part and quite uncharacteristic of a man noted for his discretion.

It is of historical interest to notice that both Hatim Khan and Bahadur Shah are portrayed as acquiring independent sovereignty on the death of their father, Sultan Shamsuddin. This implies that, no matter what signs of royalty he had allo-

13. S.H. Askari, "Historical value of the Sufic Hagiographical Works of the Sultanate Period", *JBRS*, vol. LII (1966), p. 155.
14. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 80.
15. Askari, *Op. Cit.*, p. 148.

wed his sons to display during his own lifetime, such as Bahadur Shah's Lakhnauti coins, there was no question of independent sovereignty, much less of having driven Shamsuddin out of Sonargaon or anywhere else.

Probably the most significant reminiscence pertaining to Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz Shah is the following :

Maulana Zainuddin Hafiz, the brother of my Maulana (i.e. Tau'ama), had mastered the art of music. He was famous for his pleasant voice. At this time, it so happened that Sultan Shamsuddin grew enamoured of his singing. He made him his prayer-leader. Sultan Shamsuddin had a different prayer-leader and caller to prayer in each palace and station. Whenever he arrived anywhere and the time for prayer arrived, the prayer-leader of the place would give an indication that he was about to lead the prayers. If Maulana Zainuddin was present, however, invariably the local leader would step forward but Sultan Shamsuddin would give a sign indicating that Maulana Zainuddin should go to the front.

When Sultan Shamsuddin died, Prince (Shāhzāda) Qutlugh Khan made him his prayer-leader, saying : "You were Shamsuddin's prayer-leader. Now, I won't let you go. Be my prayer-leader !"

After that, he became the prince's prayer-leader and used to lead the prayers for Prince Qutlugh Khan. One day, Qutlugh Khan visited Qazi Shangarfi, who was very strict in this matter. He asked him who the man was behind whom he was accustomed to pray. He replied, "Behind Maulana Zainuddin."

"For how many years ?" (chand sāl)

"So many times !" (chandīn gāh)

Qazi Shangarfi, who was chief of the department of justice (ṣadr-i jahān), stated emphatically : "Those prayers will have to be said again !"[3] (*Mukhkh* 23, p. 55)

The following excerpt also adds to our knowledge :

Someone remarked that it was said of Qutlugh Khan that he

took a keen interest in things worth learning. Also, there were several scholars present in his court.

The Venerable Master said : "This is why he had such a love for learning that this taste outweighed all others. A taste for infused knowledge is something great." (*Mukhkh* 17, p. 33)

This reference to Qutlugh Khan's court and the fact that he appointed Maulana Zainuddin as his prayer-leader on the death of his father, coupled to the fact that both Hatim Khan and Bahadur Shah began to reign as independent sultans on the death of their father, as Sharafuddin himself has informed us, lead us to the conclusion that Qutlugh Khan did the same in Sonargaon. It is not possible to make too much of Qazi Shangarfi's question, for it is not restricted to the period after the death of Shamsuddin. Obviously, Qutlugh Khan was in the habit of joining his father to pray behind Zainuddin whenever his father was in Sonargaon. Sharafuddin's intimate knowledge of details about Qutlugh Khan after the death of Shamsuddin indicates his continued presence in Sonargaon after the death of the Sultan.

In order to determine how long he continued to stay in Sonargaon, it is instructive to try to determine the movements of Bahadur Shah after he heard of his father's death and assumed sovereignty in Kamrup. His ambitions went beyond Kamrup. If one examines a physical map of the area and remembers that Lakhnauti was the traditional capital of what might be loosely called Bengal, then it is obvious that the first strike must have been directed in that direction for, in addition to being the most important centre, it was the closest and easiest one for him to reach. As there are coins issued from Lakhnauti in the name of yet another brother, Shihabuddin Bughdah, in 1317 and 1318 A.D., it is probable that he was there in 1322 as well. Bahadur Shah then swung due east and founded a fortress-capital called Ghiyaspur, near modern Nasirabad in Bangladesh, for he issued a coin from there in 1322 A.D. itself. This put him within striking distance of Sylhet to the east and Sonargaon to the south. Satgaon, near modern Calcutta, was a little

further away, as was Bihar, where Hatim Khan had begun to rule. Ibn Battuta's evidence tends to confirm this picture :

> Shamsuddin died leaving the throne to his son Shihabuddin who succeeded his father. Subsequently his youngest brother Ghiyasuddin Bahadur...vanquished him, seized the throne and killed his brother Qutlu Khan as well as his other brothers. Of these, Shihabuddin and Nasiruddin fled to Tughluq.[16]

It seems most likely that Nasiruddin had been ruling in Satgaon and that he made his move to secure Lakhnauti through the help of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tugluq of Delhi some time after Bahadur Shah had driven Shihabuddin out of Lakhnauti. Nasiruddin did succeed in ruling as a puppet in Lakhnauti for a few years, whereas Shihabuddin is never heard of again.

On the basis of the evidence supplied from the discourses of Sharafuddin, in conjunction with other sources, there is good reason for believing that Shamsuddin reigned over Lakhnauti, Sonargaon, Satgaon, Kamrup and Bihar, but shared his task of ruling with his sons. some of whom were allowed royal prerogatives such as the issuing of coins. Parallels could be cited. For example, Firuz Shah of Delhi conferred all the prerogatives of royalty upon his son Muhammad, and the names of both were read during the Friday prayers.[17]

In passing, it might be mentioned that Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz Shah was, from the portrait painted by the reminiscences of Sharafuddin and other evidence, a remarkable man. He ruled capably over what is now Bengal, Bangladesh, Bihar and Assam. He skilfully utilized the services of his sons in this task, making concessions where he deemed them prudent. He was a great builder and a sultan who took pains to attract scholars and capable men to his court. He was greatly admired and respected by Sharafuddin, who was a very shrewd judge of men. He also had the uncommon virtue of being able to listen to unpalatable opinions without turning against the person who had proferred

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16. Hussain, *The Fehla of Ibn Battuta*, p. 50.
17. Habib & Nizami, *The Delhi Sultanat*, p, 618.

them. In what could be taken as an indirect tribute to his strength and military prowess, Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughluq of Delhi sent his son, Muhmmad bin Tughluq, to far-distant Telingana in 1321 A.D., not to Bengal to reclaim it for the Delhi Sultanate. Only after Shamsuddin died did Ghivasuddin move towards Bengal.

It seems likely that Bahadur Shah somehow contrived to have Qutlugh Khan murdered in the year 1323 A.D. and that the murder of this gracious prince made Sharafuddin decide to leave Sonargaon and return to Maner.

One final reminiscence of a public nature throws yet more light on the development that must have occurred rather quickly in Sonargaon. It may be dubbed "The Great Lime Scare." Sharafuddin lells us that

> "once, in Sonargaon, the scholars began to condemn the use of lime, saying that it was forbidden, because shells are made up of elements from creeping sea creatures, which are themselves forbidden food. For this reason, lime should also be forbidden. There was a commotion in Sonargaon. News that the scholars were declaring that the use of lime was forbidden reached the nobles and leading men. They also grew perplexed, wondering whether they should continue using lime or not. They gathered the expounders of the Law (muftiyān) together. They said; 'So many thousands of people are being sorely tried in this matter. Great hardship would be caused to them if we were to give an answer in favour of the opinion of the scholars, for such a reply would have the force of law. Many Muslims would be taking something forbidden.'
>
> The result was that not a single legal expert wrote a judgement in favour of the prohibition."

Maulana Karimuddin again asked what the legal foundation of their refusal might have been.

The Master replied : "They wanted to make things easy for the people, for the Path of Islam is a wide-open one.

It is not lawful to pass a law which would be a burden for the people." (*Khwān* 6, pp. 13-14)

In this reminiscence of Sonargaon we notice that a number of expounders of the Law were gathered together, and that many thousands of people would be affected. We should also note that scholars (muta'allimān) began to condemn the practice. The inevitable conclusion is that, at the time this incident occurred, Sonargaon was definitely a large Muslim centre, replete with schools, mosques, scholars and experts in expounding the Law. Abu Tau'ama, as a leading scholar from Delhi, would have found such a place congenial. It is not possible to imagine his going off to some town which was most definitely not a seat of Islamic learning.

Personal Reminiscences

Further precious reminiscences from Sonargaon help. They are of a more personal nature. Sharafuddin related, during an assembly, that

the brother of my teacher, Maulana Zainuddin, lived in Sonargaon. He knew the Quran by heart. During class it sometimes happened that some verse would crop up in connexion with holding fast to some command. The Maulana would need to know which chapter it came from. Whenever, however, Maulana Zainuddin was present, he would request him to tell him the chapter where the verse was found. For the sake of a little fun and in order to pass the time, he would keep quiet. Thus he would draw out the time and wink at his companions as if to say, "What will he say now ?" Then the Maulana would turn to him and say : "Enough's enough ! Now tell me which chapter it comes from." He would then tell him which chapter it came from. (*Ma'dan* 6, p. 44)

Zainuddin was the younger brother of Abu Tau'ama. From time to time he was present at the time fixed for class. It is clear from the account that Sharafuddin is narrating what he himself personally saw, during class time, for the details are all

quite vividly portrayed. Equally clear was the fact that this sort of thing happened on more than one occasion, and that Sharafuddin knew how much Zainuddin loved a little fun, but also that he was careful not to overstep the mark, for he would supply the required information in the end.

The impression given is that Zainuddin was considerably younger than Abu Tau'ama, much closer in age to Sharafuddin than to his teacher. He was a Hafiz, (i.e. he knew the Quran by heart) whereas his elder brother was not. He had probably begun his education in Delhi before proceeding to Sonargaon. The case for his comparative youthfulness is further strengthened by Sharafuddin's remarks that

> Sultan Shamsuddin was very fond of the way Zainuddin recited the Quran... If Maulana Zainuddin happend to be present, inevitably it happened that, in spite of his being there, the leader for the particular residence would step forward. Immediately Sultan Shamsuddin would say : "Zainuddin, you come forward !" and to Maulana Ziauddin, "Give way to him !" The latter had the title, "Sheikh of Islam."
>
> This Maulana Zainuddin arrived with three or four of his friends in order to visit the Sufi centre and recite something in front of Maulana Ziauddin. He liked his recital very much and told his companions to tell the man with the golden voice. "I won't let you go. I have a daughter and I want you for my son-in law."
>
> His friends came to him in high good humour, saying : "Now you have been greatly blessed ! What more do you want ?" Accordingly, Maulana Ziauddin gave him his daughter, along with many goods and possessions. (*Ma'dan* 6, p. 44)

This record of Zainuddin's marriage further indicates that he was still a young man at the time. We have every reason to presume that Sharafuddin himself was one of the friends who had accompanied Zainuddin on this visit to Maulana Ziauddin and had become involved in the marriage proposal. He was also present in the mosque for the previous incident.

This recollection of minute details, even of feelings, high-

lights an extremely important point in evaluating the reminiscences of Sharafuddin, for they themselves date approximately from the early forties, while Sultan Shamsuddin died in 1322 A.D. Many vivid details freely given reveal quite clearly that he himself had noticed them and was able to recall them more than twenty or even fifty years later. Consider, for example, the visit to Maulana Ziauddin. Sharafuddin must have enjoyed the whole affair very much—a visit to recite the Quran ends up in a marriage proposal—and undoubtedly he was in high good humour as he rushed to tell Zainuddin of his good luck. He could still recapture the excitement and joy he had experienced so many years previously !

Another precious memory from the Sonargaon days tells us how attentively Sharafuddin used to watch his teacher, Abu Tau'ama, twiddling away with his silk ribbons while his mind was fully engrossed in searching for the solution of some problem :

> Maulana Sharafuddin Tau'ama was so learned that he had become a renowned scholar throughout all Hindustan and nobody had any doubt about his knowledge. He wore silk ribbons in his hair. He also wore a pyjama-cord of silk. He has written in such a way as would be difficult to emulate afterwards. If some difficulty cropped up during a lesson, he would pause to reflect. While thus absorbed he would begin to finger the hair which fell to his shoulders. He would be thus preoccupied until the difficulty was solved. He would then let go his hair and explain the nature of the difficulty. (*Khwān* 6, pp. 15-16)

In addition to affirming the wide fame enjoyed by his revered teacher, the incident also indicates that Sharafuddin's mind, unlike that of his illustrious teacher, was not always as preoccupied with solving difficulties as was his teacher's ! He had time to notice his idiosyncrasies.

While discussing the topic of whether we can see God in this life, Sharafuddin recalls :

> I had heard so in Bengal, from Amir Fazil Balkhi. The Balkhis are quite capable exegetes and traditionists, and they

handle Quranic exegesis with particular skill. Once Amir Fazil Balkhi was explaining some verses of the Quran when he came to the verse dealing with the vision of God. This very point—whether we can see God in this life or not—arose. He said, "No, for the reason that the world is the abode of transitoriness, whereas vision leads to immortality and any passing-away becomes impossible, for 'Everything in this world is transitory'."

Hence, there is no vision here, and that concludes the matter. (*Khwān* 29, p. 76)

As Abu Tau'ama was not a Hafiz, nor was Quranic exegesis his particular speciality, he probably advised young Sharafuddin to attend the classes conducted by an expert in the field, Amir Fazil Balkhi.

One very poignant memory from Sonargoan has come down to us. Sharafuddin informs us that,

"in Sonargaon, Malik ul-Quzat, the son of Qazi Husamuddin, had a much better grasp of the Sufi Way than did his other sons. He had the disposition of a dervish, and was uneasy about life. When he died, Qazi Husamuddin cried and wailed over him, even though he was fully aware of what was forbidden and allowed in such matters. All the great and leading men used to be present in his assembly. This was especially true when his son died. All the leading men were there. Qazi Husamuddin was lamenting loudly over his loss. There was also a student present. He began to chide Qazi Husamuddin for his behaviour. The Qazi heard him out each time, shaking his head, once, twice, but the third time his patience gave out. He made a sign that he should be taken by the hand and led outside. Everyone present was happy when this was done for, in the assembly of saintly personages, how could such nonsense be tolerated ?"

When Sharafuddin reached these words, he made this comment : "In the assembly of the revered ones there is nothing else to do except keep quiet." (*Ma'dan* 62, pp. 485-6)

Sharafuddin was evidently one of those who were happy when the young man was ejected from the assembly. His behaviour was too much for the Qazi, Husamuddin Shangarfi, especially at such a moment of grief. We may assume that this was not the only occasion Sharafuddin visited the Qazi's residence. Malik ul-Quzat could easily have been a fellow-student and friend of his. The mention of the reaction of the people in the assembly is a significant detail, one coming from a person who was present and felt the same way as the others did. It is encouraging to find everybody, Sharafuddin included, commiserating with Qazi Husamuddin on the occasion of his sad loss. They rejected, in a wholesome manner, the false perfectionist behaviour expected by the student. The Qazi knew fully well, as Sharafuddin explicitly states, the stereotyped behaviour expected of him, but his heart was broken, and he could not pretend that it wasn't. Gradually he would draw comfort from his faith, but the loss of such a beloved and promising son was a sore trial for him to endure.

One final reminiscence of Sonargaon highlights the fact that Sharafuddin had frequent occasion to observe the habitual behaviour of Sultan Shamsuddin.

> When Maulana Ziauddin came to pay a visit to Sultan Shamsuddin, he saw that Qazi Husamuddin Shangarfi and Maulana Wahiduddin were already occupying the seats to the right and left of the Sultan. Hence he sat down in front of the Sultan and began to speak about the virtues of some men from the past. The Sultan had the habit (*'ādatī būd*) of turning to look at anybody (*rū'ī bedū āwardī*) who had some words of wisdom to offer. Qazi Husamuddin was moved by a subtle point of learning. He said : "Maulana, what are you saying ? If they were men, so am I a man !" (*Ṣafar*, 15 Jamadi 11, p. 95)

It is obvious, from the quotations given above, that Sharafuddin spent many years in Sonargaon while Shamsuddin Firuz Shah was reigning there (1301-22 A.D.) and that he continued to remain there for a short period after his death, under Qutlugh Khan. No other sultan is mentioned in any of the

Sonargaon reminiscenccs that have so far been traced in the source material. In the light of what has been presented here, we can say that Sharafuddin was in Sonargaon from about 1304 until 1323 A.D.

This assertion is obliquely supported by a short reference to Bihar. Sharafuddin said : "I have heard that, in Bihar, during the time of Sultan Shamsuddin, the first governor (maqṭa') of Bihar, Malik Nathu, was removed from office and his place taken by Malik Alauddin." (*Safar*, p. 84) This is presented as hearsay evidence (shanīde'am), which is precisely what we would expect from a person in Sonargaon at the time the incident occurred.

In view of the material presented above, we can now ask ourselves about the portrait of Sharafuddin that emerges from his own recollections. He was obviously interested in his studies and applied himself seriously to the noble pursuit of the various Islamic religious sciences. His approach, however, was leisurely enough for him to notice the idiosyncrasies of his beloved teacher, Maulana Tau'ama, and to appreciate the good-natured humour of his teacher's younger brother, Maulana Zainuddin. He was also greatly excited at the unusual way this latter received a proposal for marriage. He listened to lectures delivered by other specialists in their fields, e.g. exegesis by Amir Fazil Balkhi, and also attended the gatherings in the residence of the chief of the department of Justice, Qazi Husamuddin Shangarfi. He was also in a position to listen to Sultan Shamsuddin and observe his mannerisms on a number of occasions.

Hence, all the evidence points to his being a very sociable young man, dedicated to his studies but not a slave to them, a person interested in observing other people and entering into their joys and sorrows.

In the light of this evidence, drawn from unimpeachable sources, we are now able to look critically at the picture painted by the author of *Manāqib ul-Aṣfiyā*. He says that Sharafuddin

> remained withdrawn in order to devote himself, night and day, to the acquisition of the religious sciences. During this

period, he also practised austerities and self-control, including special days of fasting. On account of this single-minded dedication, he did not take his meals at the table of Maulana Sharafuddin Tau'ama. He used to say that a great deal of time was wasted during meal-times. When Maulana Sharafuddin Tau'ama enquired about all this, he made arrangements for him to eat separately. (*Manāqib*, p. 132)

This portrait of an extremely ascetical young man, slavishly and single-mindedly engrossed in his studies, and showing definitely anti-social tendencies, is not compatible with the one painted by Sharafuddin himself in his recollections, and has to be considered an exaggeration. His further statement, that he afterwards "returned to Maner in order to be of service to his mother" (id.) has also to be put aside, for Sharafuddin spent only a very short period of time with her when he returned to Maner.

One further question pertains to Sharafuddin's sojourn in Sonargaon. When he returned to Maner he entrusted his young son, Zakiuddin, to his mother. This son is referred to several times in the twelfth chapter of *Ma'dan ul-Ma'ānī*, for example. The difficulty is : who was the boy's mother ? From the time Sharafuddin left Sonargaon he led a completely celibate life. Moreover, he makes no reference whatsoever, in all the source material so far perused, to the mother of his son, Zakiuddin. To be sure, there is a traditional story which says his teacher, Maulana Tau'ama, gave him his daughter in marriage,[18] but there is no reference to this in the source material. The only hint we get is from *Manāqib ul-Asfiyā*, dating from the early fifteenth century. The author says that, while Sharafuddin was engrossed in his studies in Sonargaon, he had fallen ill. The physicians of that place said that intercourse was the remedy for his complaint. In order to overcome his sickness, he got married. He had one son. (*Manāqib*, p. 132)

The picture of a strained, nervous ascetic young man who-quite understandably, in such circumstances—falls ill, is in con-

18. Z.A.B. Azimabadi, *Sīrat ush-Sharaf*, pp. 50-52.

sonance with the one painted in that work, but which has been considered exaggerated in view of the material provided by Sharafuddin himself. It is hard to see that sociable and very likeable young man succumbing to any form of nervous disorder. It is possible that he had grown too intent on his studies, fallen sick, accepted the advice of the physicians and then began to lead a more relaxed life, allowing greater reign to his natural inclinations and talents, and that this is the period which comes to his mind when he is reminiscing.

Taking into account the remedy suggested, some form of sexual difficulty seems to have been the problem, possibly no more than the normal stress and strain of a healthy young man who is striving, in all lawful ways, to cope with the difficulties to be expected in such circumstances, especially in view of the intellectual demands Sharafuddin was making on himself. Muzaffar Shams Balkhi provides us with some important information at this juncture. While giving some advice in this area, he recalls what his own spiritual guide, Sharafuddin, had said :

> The Revered Sheikh had first recommended fasting for several days, along with prayer and reflection. It did not help him. He again came and requested his assistance. The Revered Sheikh said : "It has become necessary to purchase a slave-girl so that he may be able to drive the temptation away when it arises." He did not do so. If he had, he would have experienced happiness. (*Muzaffar* 125, p. 391)

There is no doubt that Muzaffar himself favoured such a practice, for he recommended it in several of his letters, e.g. nos 125, 126 and 130. Sharafuddin's idea was that the slave-girl (kanīzak) could be kept for as long as she was needed, and then be given up. Muzaffar would have known many details about what happened at Sonargaon and it is possible that his teaching not merely reflects that of Sharafuddin—as we have just seen—but that it is also founded on what he had done in Sonargaon. This is an important point in view of the assertion that Sharafuddin actually got married in Sonargaon. This seems to be based more on conviction than on hard evidence.

Until such is forthcoming, we have to query what is adduced by Azimabadi, particularly the neat yet unsupported solution of the problem of explaining why Sharafuddin did not bring his wife back to Maner—she had died in Sonargaon ! She would obviously have been a young woman and, unless solid evidence in support of her death is forthcoming, we have to presume that she did not die. Then comes the problem, for it would mean that Sharafuddin must have divorced her before he set out for Maner. This is scarcely tenable, especially if he had married Abu Tau'ama's daughter—as is asserted—for this would have been a grave insult to his teacher.

It is far more plausible to argue, in view of the circumstances of the age, that Sharafuddin simply took a slave-girl, most probably provided by his teacher. Ibn Battuta, who was in Bengal in 1345 A.D., says that beautiful slave-girls, fit "to be mistresses," were available for one gold coin (dīnār), and he informs us that he purchased one for himself.[19] The arrangement to keep a slave-girl could have been made quite easily, in contrast to the complicated formalities involved in marriage, and the practice was quite lawful.[20] Moreover, any child born of this union would be free.[21] If there was no formal marriage bond, Sharafuddin could easily have left Zakiuddin's mother behind in Sonargaon. It would also explain the silence surrounding her in the source material, for her name is not even mentioned.

Now we come to the problem of text of the *Manāqib*. It is true that the printed version, dated 1895 A.D., says that "he got married. From that he had one son" (nikāḥ kard. az ān yak pesar shud) (p. 132). Abdali, however, quotes a manuscript dated 1143 A.H. (1730-31 A.D.) which says (p. 142) that he took a slave-girl, by whom he had one son, and he also says he found this in a manuscript of *Ganj-i Arshadī*. p. 110. The wording he quotes is : "kanīzakī dāsht. az ān kanīzak yak pesar shud).[22]

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19. M. Husain (Transl), *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta* (Baroda, 1953), p. 235.
20. R. Levy, *The Social Structure* of Islam, (Cambridge, 1969), p. 234.
21. Idem., p. 79.
22. M.T. Abdali, *Wasīlat-i Sharaf, wa Dari' at-i Daulat*, (Allahabad, 1965), p. 17.

There is further manuscript evidence to show that Sharafuddin took a slave-girl. It is dated 1337 A.H. (1918-19 A.D.), i.e. after the printed version appeared. The wording is : "He took a slave-girl. He married her. By her he had a son. He called him Zakiuddin." (kanīzakī dāsht. 'aqd kard. az ān yak pesar shude. nām-i Zakiuddin dāsht.) (Pers. MS no. 1837, *Dīwan-i Muzaffar Balkhī*, K.B.O.P.L., fol. 83 b). Just as the name is a patent addition, so too is the superfluous reference to a marriage to a slave-girl. In order to check Abdali's quotes the present writer paid a visit to Sheikhpura, named after Sheikh Shu'aib, who is reputed to have written the *Manāqib*. In the khanqah Shah Shamsuddin showed me a copy of *Manāqib* written by Shah Turab Ali in 1228 AH (1813). The wording is exactly the same as that quoted by Abdali : "He took a slave-girl. By that slave-girl he had one son". Hence the manuscript evidence is clearly in favour of Sharafuddin's having kept a slave-girl, not of having entered into matrimony.

There is an interesting parallel with Sharafuddin's younger, extremely famous contemporary, the renowned Chishti Sufi, Gesu Daraz. In an account of his discourses (*Tārīkh-Habībī*, by Abdul Aziz, dated 849 A.H. (1445) Pers. MS no 3011, K.B.O.P.L, Patna) he is recorded as saying : "Up till the age of thirty I did not know what is was like to have intimate 'dealings with women." (p. 8) Gesu Daraz also had some difficulty and an expert physician purchased a slave-girl for him. He had no child by her. Only after a further ten years, when he was forty, did he marry. He had two sons and three daughters from this marriage.

It can be seen that, in those days, renowned Sufis thought nothing of making use of this provision of Islamic Law. While Gesu Daraz decided, after ten years, to marry, Sharafuddin preferred to remain celibate from the time he left Sonargaon, i.e. from about thirty-three years of age.

When Sharafuddin returned to Maner with his young son, probably in 1323 A.D., he entrusted him to his mother and told her that she should consider him her own son in place of him, and that she should consider him as good as dead. After this, he headed off for Delhi. (*Manāqib*, p. 132) It is commonly

accepted that Sharafuddin's father, Yahya Maneri, had died while his son was still in Sonargaon.

Off to Delhi

It was probably by the spring of 1334 A.D. that Sharafuddin set out for Delhi. Based on the evidence of *Manāqib ul-Aṣfiya* (pp. 132-3) this visit is traditionally depicted as having been of a very short duration. It also mentions that Sharafuddin had met Nizamuddin Auliya, the most famous Sufi of his age. Abul Fazl also says a meeting took place : "Sharafuddin came to Delhi and paid his respects to Sheikh Nizam (i.e. Auliya). At his instigation he entered the service of Sheikh Najmuddin (i.e. Najibuddin) Firdausi."[23] Against this is the assertion, by no less an authority than Abdul Haqq, that Nizamuddin had died before Sharafuddin reached Delhi.[24] As the *Manāqib* also informs us that Sharafuddin had met Sheikh Sharafuddin Panipati (p. 132), and he is commonly believed to have died on 13 Ramzan, 724 A.H. (3 September, 1324), this tends to support the evidence produced for a meeting between Sharafuddin and Nizamuddin. Sharafuddin himself tells us that

> Maulana Ziauddin Sunami was both a renowned traditionist and Quranic commentator. One day I was present in his congregation. A man wrote this very question on a piece of paper and gave it to the Maulana. He climbed to the top of the pulpit, sat down and said : "On this piece of paper, such and such a question has been written." (*Ma'dan* 12, p. 117)

Ziauddin Sunami was thus very much alive and teaching when Sharafuddin was in Delhi. Abdul Haqq says Nizamuddin Auliya attended Sunami's death-bed and exclaimed, upon his death ; "He was a person who defended the Law. Alas, he is no more."[25] This, in effect, contradicts his statement that Nizamuddin Auliya had died before Sharafuddin reached Delhi. We conclude that the two great Sufis did, in fact, meet.

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23. Beveridge, H. (Transl.) *Akbar Nāma*, vol. III, p. 133.
24. A. Haqq, *Akbār ul-Akhyār*, p. 113.
25. Zamiruddin, *Sīrat ush-Sharaf*, p. 64 (quote).

Before turning to Sharafuddin's biographer for an account of his sojourn in Delhi, we can review some of the evidence of that visit found embedded in the source material. To begin with, from his having attended Sunami's lecture, we can confidently say that this was not an isolated incident.

The following reminiscence yields some interesting information :

> The master related this story : "While Sheikh Nizamuddin (Auliya) was still alive, Sheikh Amu visited him and asked for a skull-cap. He presented him with one. He did not, however, pledge formal allegiance or have his hair cut.
>
> After the demise of Sheikh Nizamuddin. Sheikh Ahmad again went to Delhi. He requested Sheikh Mahmud (i.e. Nasiruddin Chiragh Dehlavi) to accept him formally as his disciple. Sheikh Mahmud asked him if he was anybody's disciple. He replied that he had been given a skull-cap by Sheikh Nizamuddin but had not placed his hands in his and pledged formal allegiance to him.
>
> Sheikh Mahmud replied : 'That is not necessary. It is a pledge.' Now, there were a number of Sufis present at the time and they began to discuss the matter among themselves. They considered the cap to be a form of blessing, not a pledge of allegiance. Finally, Sheikh Mahmud also began to ponder the matter. He said : 'I shall consult the other Sheikhs about this matter. I shall also discuss it myself and look for an explanation in the books of the Sheikhs in order to find out what should be done in this particular matter.'
>
> Sheikh Mahmud ordered the books to be scanned. He sent other devotees to go and explain the affair to the other Sheikhs and ask their opinion. Finally, a consensus was reached among all the Sheikhs and dervishes that it was not a formal pledge of allegiance. Sheikh Ahmad Amu would have to pledge allegiance, for the cap had only been a blessing from the Sheikh." (*Ma'dan* 19, pp. 164-5)

There is a ring of familiarity with the details of this incident

which makes us inclined to believe that Sharafuddin was in Delhi at the time. As other Sheikhs were consulted, this would have included his own, Najibuddin Firdausi. The incident also throws light on the status of Nasiruddin Chiragh Dehlavi. He is obviously held in high respect, but this does not mean that others do not feel free to question his opinion. There is no blind acceptance of what he says. In the instance quoted, he is obliged to change his opinion. It does not, however, reflect ill on him. Quite the contrary! The modern reader cannot fail to be impressed by the eminently reasonable manner in which the Sheikh sought the answer to a practical difficulty. It is instructive to mention, however, that there is a total absence of this somewhat democratic process in the recorded discourses of Sharafuddin himself. Nowhere do we find his opinion contradicted. Often further explanations are requested, but there is an air of finality about what Sharafuddin says. This is not surprising in view of his vast learning, ably assisted by a quick and retentive memory and, even more so, by the tremendous esteem in which he was held as a Sufi saint, a man who had indeed acquired the pearl of great price, an intimate union with God himself. This fact was doubted by none and was the ultimate source of his prestige.

Sharafuddin's other reminiscences of Delhi are few and precious. They have to be studied to get some idea of the length of time he spent there. If he arrived before September 1324 A.D.—as he must have—and stayed till October, 1332 A.D. (when Najibuddin died), then it was a period of eight years. This is a far cry from the usually-accepted lightning visit, based on *Manāqib*. p. 132. In support of the longer period of some eight years we may look at the following :

Sayyid Auhaduddin was mentioned and Maulana Karimuddin asked who the Sayyid was who was visiting the Venerable Master. Sharafuddin replied that it was his spiritual guide's sister's son.

He added : "Sayyid Alauddin Jyuri was a distinguished man of letters. He was also a man of prayer and of good lineage. My spiritual guide studied Quranic exegesis and Tradition

under him. Sayyid Alauddin had a fixed schedule for the week. One day would be devoted to jurisprudence ; another to grammar and logic; another to first principles and rhetoric; another to exegesis and Tradition, and so on. Each day was devoted to its own distinct subject.

All the theologians, Sufis, and great men of Delhi used to visit the king. Sayyid Alauddin stood alone in not personally paying his respects to the king. It reached the point that, on several occasions when a proclamation was made that all the notables of the city should attend upon the king, one and all were present except Sayyid Alauddin. He used to say : 'No matter what happens, I shall never go to the king !" (*Khwān* 40, p. 103)

It is natural to conclude that this information about Sayyid Alauddin Jyuri came to Sharafuddin from his own guide, Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi. He would have been acquainted with his teacher's schedule.

More details are provided :

Zain Badr Arabi asserts that this was heard from the blessed lips of Sayyid Auhaduddin : "My mother and the Revered Sheikh, Najibuddin, were both born of the same mother, whereas Sheikh Ruknuddin and Sheikh Nizamuddin were born from a different Mother."

The Venerable Master agreed : "From the household of the deceased Sheikh Imaduddin Firdausi two brothers, Amir Khurd and Amir Buzurg, were living in Nauhatta. The former had a daughter of whom my spiritual guide and the mother of Sayyid Auhaduddin were both born "

He then went on to add : "Previous to this, Sheikh Ruknuddin was famous and well-known in Delhi on account of the fact that it was he who used to celebrate the feast-days of the saints. Moreover, it was he who introduced this type of celebration into Delhi." ('urs dar Dehli paidā ıshān kardand) (*Khwān* 40, p. 103)

This information is rendered more precise by the following account from *Manāqib* :

After a while, Sheikh Imaduddin Firdausi, along with both his sons, one a young man called Sheikh Nizamuddin, and the other, a small boy called Sheikh Ruknuddin, arrived at the Sayyid's (Amir Khurd's) hospice...

Sayyid Amir Khurd sent somebody to Khwaja Badruddin Samarqandi, saying : "The lad you had discovered in your dream has arrived. He is truly your son."

Khwaja Badruddin Samarqandi came, took Khwaja Ruknuddin back home with him, and began to take care of him. (He relates how he instructed him in religious knowledge, initiated him into the Sufi Way, and appointed him his successor.)

Sheikh Najibuddin Firqausi was the son of Sheikh Imaduddin Firdausi, and was the successor and brother, by a different mother, of Sheikh Ruknuddin Firdausi. His mother was renowned for having come from a family of Sayyids, for her saintliness, religious experience and miraculous powers . . .

She was the daughter of Sayyid Amir Khurd (*Manāqib*, pp. 124-6)

All of this detailed information obviously reached Sharafuddin through Najibuddin Firdausi and his family members. It presupposes a somewhat extended sojourn with his Sheikh, Najibuddin, during which he not only made progress in the Sufi Way, but also picked up information about his Sheikh's family, teacher and spiritual guide. This would not have been possible if his visit had been a flying one. Several facts of historical interest emerge : the origin of '*urs* celebrations in Delhi (and, presumably, India as a whole); the name 'Firdausi' came from Imaduddin Firdausi, father of both Ruknuddin Firdausi, the spiritual successor of Badruddin Samarqandi, who introduced the order into India, and of Najibuddin Firdausi, his younger brother (by a different mother) and spiritual successor, This correct explanation, differing from Trimingham's,[26] is

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26. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, p. 56.

confirmed by the genealogy of the Firdausi Order supplied by Sharafuddin himself during an assembly :

> Najibuddin Firdausi, Ruknuddin Firdausi, Badruddin Samarqandi, Saifuddin Bakharzi, Najmuddin Kubra, Zia-uddin Abu Najib Suhrawardi, Wajhuddin Abu Hafs, Muhammad ibn Abduallah al-Ma' aruf, Ahmad Siyah Dinar, Mumshad al-Dinawari, Abul Qasim Junaid Baghdadi, Sari Saqati, Ma'ruf Markhi, Imam Ali Reza, through the other Imams to Ali and, finally, Muhammad. (*Ma'dan* 22, p. 195)

According to the chronology advocated in the present work, Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325-51 A.D.) was the reigning Sultan of Delhi for the period of Sharafuddin's sojourn there, 1324-32 A.D. We shall examine Sharafuddin's references to him in order to see if they can be of help, as well as of interest, to us. He makes the following three comments in his *Hundred Letters.*

> Externalist theologians do not realize that the absence of something in the house of a beggar is no argument in favour of its not being found in the palace of Sultan Muhammad Shah either. (*100 Letters*, 26 p. 106)

> It is also related that Adam's head was raised and also that the crown of avoidance of sin was placed upon his head. But as for you and me, and others like us, we can make no such boast. Muhammad Shah can say whatever he likes to Khwaja Jahan (his prime minister), but if you or I were to say what he says, our heads would not remain in place. (*100 L.* 63, p. 254).

> The trouble is, however, that you are in love with yourself. You don't possess the strength derived from faith which would enable you to doff the cap of lordship; nor are you able to put up with hearing your good name being dragged into the mud; nor are you able to exchange your own security for the sake of reproaches. Every day you walk pompously out of some school and enter a cloister in order that your cap of lordship, as well as the beginnings of piety, knowledge and rank, might become higher and more exalted. Thus your tongue will grow longer and be

able to cover and ever-wider range of topics. Your despotic rule and killing of people also increases. Simply on the basis of your own knowledge, you bestow excellence on ordinary people while, by means of your claimed mystical knowledge, you consider yourself better than the nobility. (*100* L. 41, p. 156).

Muhammad bin Tughluq was the reigning Sultan when the *Hundred letters* were written in 1346-7 A.D. It was impossible for people not to be aware of this fact. He was a sultan who really ruled his domain, and woe betide the person who refused to obey his commands ! The first two excerpts show clearly that Sharafuddin was aware of the Sultan when he was composing his letters. The third excerpt is the one that interests us most. No reference to the sultan is made in it, but it seems that Sharafuddin had him in mind as he penned his portrait. He certainly was not thinking of Qazi Shamsuddin, to whom he was writing. It might be maintained that it is a general picture, not of any specific person, but we have shown that he was aware of Muhammad bin Tugluq as he was writing. It is also very curious to try to work out who such a person could be. So many references to piety and knowledge, not to mention schools, cloisters and even mystical knowledge, would make one think of some eminent theologian with mystical pretensions, but the reference to "your despotic rule" and to "your killing of people" as both "increasing" certainly rules out any religious personality and makes one think immediately of Muhammad bin Tughluq, for these phrases tally with others in our source material, as well as with the portrait painted by Barani, for example.[27] Indeed, no contemporary reader could have doubted who the model for this pen-portrait was ! All the features were found combined in only one man.

The material presented here shows us that Sharafuddin was rather well informed about the Sultan, but there is only one statement that smacks of personal knowledge. It seems that Sharafuddin saw the way the Sultan bore himself as he "walked

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27. A.M. Husain, *The Rise and Fall of Muhammad bin Tughluq*, pp. 192-96.

pompously out of some school and entered a cloister." Given the Sultan's love for learning, there is no reason why Sharafuddin could not have seen him at some educational institution he had come to visit.

At this stage it has to be confessed that, while we have been supplied with a fair amount of information about Delhi, there are precious few reminiscences of the city. This is in curious contrast to the many reminiscences provided about Sonargaon. As accounts of both occur indiscriminately in the primary material, the key to this difference cannot be sought there. Rather, it seems to reflect a different set of mind in both places. In Sonargaon, Sharafuddin was younger, open to all the details of life : in Delhi, those details do not seem to matter so much. This is because of a growing interest in, and yearning for, God himself. This assertion is, moreover, in perfect harmony with the accepted reason for his trip to Delhi to find someone who could guide his response to the deeper stirrings of his being, his quest for nothing less than union with God.

It is now time to see the picture presented in *Manāqib*.

He made enquiries of some of the Delhi Sheikhs and said : "If this is what is means to be a sheikh, than I am one too !" Afterwards he visited Sheikh Nizamuddin. A learned discussion took place in his assembly. He gave replies which were much appreciated. Sheikh Nizamuddin spoke highly in his praise and had a tray of betel leaves brought out. He said, "This is a Simurgh, but he is not destined for my net."

From there he went to Panipat and met Sheikh Sharafuddin Panipati. He said of Him: "He is certainly a Sheikh, but is overcome by ecstasy. He is incapable of occupying himself with the training of others."

I have heard that, afterwards, his elder brother made mention of Khwaja Najibuddin Firdausi. He spoke of his good manner of living and virtues.

He replied thus : "The chief saint of Delhi gave me betel leaves to eat and sent me away. Why should I go to

anyone else?" His brother replied: "What harm is there in simply meeting him? You should see him."

Since his brother was insisting, he agreed to visit him, and set out. He strolled along, chewing betel as he went. He also had some betel leaves stuck in his turban. As he approached the residence of Khwaja Najibuddin Firdausi, a kind of fear seized him. He grew confused. In his heart, he said: "I went to Sheikh Nizamuddin. On that occasion, I didn't feel afraid. What does this fear, which grips me now, mean?"

When he reached the Khwaja, he still had some betel in his mouth. When the Khwaja's gaze fell upon him, he said: "One betel in his mouth, and others in his turban, and he affirms that he is a sheikh." Immediately he spat out the betel. Terror-struck, he began to sweat. He sat down respectfully. After some time, he asked to become a disciple. Khwaja Najibuddin honoured him with discipleship. He brought out the certificate of authorization which he had written twelve years before his coming and had kept safely for him. He honoured him with it.

Sheikh Sharafuddin said: "I have not yet performed any service for you, nor have I learnt from you how to travel along the Way. How can I do what you are authorizing me to?"

Khwaja Najibuddin said: "I wrote this certificate at the command of the Prophet. He will attend to your training. You will also need some from spiritual guides, but don't worry about this work."

After giving him some training in the Path, he bade him goodbye, saying: "If you hear anything along the way, don't turn back."

After travelling one or two stages, he heard that Khwaja Najibuddin Firdausi had passed from this temporal abode to the everlasting threshold...He did not return. (*Manāqib*, p. 132).

The account provides considerable food for thought. Having noticed the tendency of Sharafuddin's biographer to exaggerate, we are not surprised at finding evidence of it here. The portrait of a self-assured, swaggering young man is admirably drawn, but is an exaggeration which serves to highlight the spiritual eminence of his Sheikh, Najibuddin, and indirectly enhance his own prestige on account of having such a distinguished spiritual guide. Sharafuddin was about thirty-four years of age when he went to Delhi and there can be no doubt that he made quite an impression on account of his vast knowledge, but he was sincerely in search of a guide, not out on a spiritual picnic. It is quite possible that he needed encouragement at a moment of disappointment, and he was certainly fond of betel leaves, and he could have felt some strange presentiment as he approached Najibuddin's place, but not in the exaggerated form here depicted. The story of his certificate of authorization is legendary, as is the implied extremely brief sojourn in Delhi. The evidence already produced indicates that he spent some time in Delhi, seriously devoting himself to serving his guide and making quiet progress along the Way to God.

Sharafuddin's biographer links his departure from Delhi to the death of his guide. It seems this is correct, but it is preferable to place it shortly after the death of the latter. Judging from the evidence concerning Delhi which has come to light, and noticing the many profoundly beautiful things Sharafuddin has to say about spiritual guides in his *Hundred Letters* the impression gained is of an association that lasted over a period of years. There was something about Najibuddin which Sharafuddin found very attractive, very lovable, and his association with him was both enjoyable and fruitful.

When discussing the various types of relationship between a disciple and his guide, Sharafuddin talks about the following types:

> Maulana Nizamuddin asked: "People commonly talk about discipleship as being based on investiture, pledging fealty, training or association. What is the basis for these distinctions? He replied: "This saying does have a foundation, but people are ignorant of it."

Afterwards he said: Discipleship by investiture with the garb of a Sufi means that a person goes to a spiritual guide, gives him his hand and has a skull-cap placed on head. This can be accounted as the Sufi dress. This is discipleship by investiture. It is also called 'pledging fealty.' The two are one and the same thing.

Discipleship by training (pīr-i tarbiyat) refers to a disciple who, some time after pledging fealty to his spiritual guide, experiences some difficulty, either from his own side or from that of his guide. For that reason he leaves his guide and goes to another one and takes training from him. He manifests his troubles and faults to him and he prescribes the appropriate remedy. Thus he acquires training at the hands of this guide. This is discipleship by training.

That of association (pīr-i ṣuḥbat), on the other hand, means that a person corrects himself simply by associating with a spiritual guide. Whatever he sees him doing, he tries to do. This is the discipleship of association."

The aforesaid Maulana Nizamuddin asked what the real difference was between the discipleship of training and that of association.

He replied: "Training means that the guide sees what his disciple needs and tells him, 'Do this' and 'Don't do that'. In association, however, his guide doesn't undertake to train him. He doesn't point out his deficiencies to him. It simply means associating with him. He does what he sees him doing. (*Khwān* 41, pp 107-8)

It seems that this distinction, which should not be taken too rigidly, supplies us with a clue to the relationship that existed between Sharafuddin and his guide, Najibuddin. The former was both more intelligent and more widely and deeply learned than the latter. Hence it was neither Najibuddin's brilliance nor his learning that attracted Sharafuddin. There was something about him that struck a chord in Sharafuddin's being—as the account of their meeting suggests—and he was attracted to him by feelings of awe, respect and affection. He instinctively felt that this was the man who could help him, more by

associating with him than by getting brilliant advice from him. There can be no doubting that Sheikh Najibuddin was a very holy man himself and an experienced guide, and it does not seem to reflect an unbridled imagination if one pictures him as guiding and encouraging Sharafuddin through his first forty-day retreat in his own little retreat-hut (chịllah gāh), as a scrawled notice still proclaims on the structure, situated a stone's throw from Najibuddin's tomb, near Mehrauli, Delhi. It is very ancient, and dates from Najibuddin's period. Anybody with experience of long periods of seclusion cannot fail to be deeply impressed by Sharafuddin's penetrating analysis of such a practice in the ninety-sixth letter in *The Hundred Letters*. One of the points he makes is the need for expert guidance during this period. The letter is the fruit of experience, and that humble little stone structure seems to be the spot where Sharafuddin made his own forty-day retreat (chillah). When a relationship like the one between him and Najibuddin is established, a disciple finds it extremely difficult simply to walk off and leave his spiritual guide, especially if he is on the point of death! As Najibuddin died on 5th October, 1332 A.D., the departure from Delhi occurred towards the end of that year.

INTO SOLITUDE

Sharafuddin left Delhi and headed towards Maner. He was about forty-two years of age, a vastly learned man and one who had travelled far along the Way to God under the tutelage of his beloved guide, Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi. He did not reach Maner, however, but went into the jungle of Bihia, and from there he moved to a cave in Rajgir. Sharafuddin himself takes us back to Rajgir in the following reminiscences:

> The Venerable Master said: "There is an idol-temple at the spring which is near the cave in Rajgir. There were some infidels who were lovers and had abandoned the world. When they die thus to the world, they are looked after in that tem-

ple. According to their religion, everyone who abandons the world and becomes a lover carves out a small stone image and catches hold of it in his left hand so that, as long as he remains alive, he keeps it in his grasp. If the person's nails grow long, they become entwined around the clasped idol. Night and day such people keep on holding their idol and remain gazing upon it. They even perform their natural functions in this position.

Such a man arrived in Rajgir. He was clasping a small stone image in his left hand. His nails had grown so long as to become entwined around his hand. One day, the image suddenly fell from his hand. The man grew quite distraught. He sat down on that very spot and began to say: 'How many years did I keep you before my gaze? Because of my love and affection for you I have abandoned everything. Now, if you had loved me, you would not have become separated from me. Since you don't love me, I have no desire to keep on living.' Immediately, he grabbed a knife and, on that very spot, slit his own throat."

When the Venerable Master reached this point in his narrative, he commented: "A Hindu does such a thing out of love for a common piece of stone: if a believer were to do something similar to this out of his faith in God, what reason would there be for astonishment?" (*Ma'dan* 32, p. 274).

The initial reference to Sharafuddin's cave in Rajgir, with a spring close by known as "Makhdum Kund," still famous and visited by many pilgrims, and situated very close to another spring where there is also a large Hindu temple, is an accurate picture of the setting of the incident narrated. His comment on the love that inspired what he would rightly have condemned as suicide is something quite extraordinary.

We also have the following reminiscence:

The Revered Master said: "When I was in my old cell, the local ruler (malik) made life very difficult for the people who mostly used to come to me and request me to intercede on their behalf. I did recommend their cases. I used to write letters of recommendation on their behalf.

A large multitude (besiyār khalq) began to come. Human as I am, I experienced considerable difficulty as a result. At that time, Sheikhzada Chishti—may God grant him peace—was also staying there.

It so happened at that particular time he visited me. He saw me afflicted. He realized that this had become very annoying for me.

He said: 'Are you put out by all this? Yes, it is a vexatious business, but do take up the burden of the people!" (*Khwān* 16, p. 40)

These are most precious reminiscences, for they indicate quite clearly that the cave in Rajgir was not an isolated spot. It was close to the old town of Rajgir which had some 600 houses in 1234 A.D., a century before Sharafuddin went there. The incident above also shows that, in addition to people flocking for temporal assistance, men renowned for spiritual attainments were also visiting Sharafuddin. We should not be surprised if he had a disciple or two at this stage. The very fact that many people came to him with requests to write petitions on their behalf to the local ruler indicates that his fame had grown enough to have a powerful influence upon this man, even though his attitude towards the people was not so helpful. All of this makes it pointless to wonder where he got his food and clothing from while in the 'seclusion' of his cave! As the previous quotation clearly shows, he did not hold himself aloof from the Hindus, and there is no reason for doubting that he wrote petitions on their behalf as well as for Muslims. It is also refreshing to see his annoyance at the continual "interruptions" to the work so dear to his heart—that of being with God and worshipping Him! He had still to learn the supreme value of "bringing comfort to hearts," a task that became increasingly dear to him as he slowly realized that the place, par excellence, to encounter God was in the heart of man.

Turning to his biography, we find the following:

Sharafuddin set out for Maner. After some time, he arrived in Bihia. One day, he heard the call of a peacock. He was

overcome by ecstasy. He secluded himself in the jungle of Bihia. Nobody knew what had happened. They searched everywhere but could find no trace of him. His brother and companions took the certificate and other sacred relics (tabarrukāt) of his guide and gave them to his mother.

I heard that Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri used to say: "When I was with Khwaja Najibuddin Firdausi, a sadness began to settle upon my heart. Each day it increased in intensity until finally, when I reached the jungle of Bihia, I hid myself there." (*Manāqib*, p. 113)

It was not a peacock but the "sadness that began to settle upon my heart," significantly "when I was with Khwaja Najibuddin Firdausi," that explains his move into Bihia, which lies south of the river Ganga and west of the Sone. These words support the contention, already made, that a gradual "withdrawal" had begun to take place while he was in Delhi, the inevitable conclusion of which was a desire for the greatest possible withdrawal, in order to achieve the greatest possible intimacy.

People who hadn't the faintest notion of this intimacy attempted to reveal the secrets of this period of intimate seclusion with stories of the following calibre:

I have heard that once Qazi Zahid, a learned man and traveller along the way, who had a firm belief in the Master of the World, said: "Master, I have heard that you didn't eat anything for thirty years, and that your natural functions ceased. How could this be explained?"

Sharafuddin replied: "I had not eaten a cooked meal for thirty years. As the need arose, I used to eat something from the jungle. After my natural functions had ceased for some years, I had a nocturnal emission. It was extremely cold weather. I went to the water-side. The thought came to me that I would perform my ablutions with sand and then perform my prayers. Afterwards I thought: 'My carnal soul is seeking rèfuge in the Law!' Immediately I rushed into the water and fell unconscious. When the sun rose, I came to my senses. The result was that I missed my morning prayer that day." (*Manāqib*, p. 136)

It is obvious that stories like this cannot be taken seriously. They do not even possess the redeeming feature of literary merit! No water, for example, ever gets cold enough to freeze in the area in which Sharafuddin was living. Hence, the effect of jumping into water, even in winter, would be a bracing one, not the one asserted here. And if he fell unconscious face down in such water, in terms of the story itself, then he would, of a certainty, have drowned! We can judge what Sharafuddin himself would have thought of such stories from his own writings. For example, writing about "Erroneous Opinions" he says that nobody stays healthy if he does not eat and drink. (*100 Letters*, 18, p. 74). Rather than presenting the reader with a fund of stories of the same genre as the one above, it seems preferable to draw a veil of secrecy over the events that occurred during the period of seclusion, as Sharafuddin himself has largely done. His biographer puts it beautifully: "God alone knows what happened between Himself and His devotee during this protracted period." (*Manāqib*, p. 133). Unfortunately, he did not heed the implication of his own statement!

Moving to Bihar

By pin-pointing when Sharafuddin came to reside on the outskirts of Bihar township we would be in a position to say how long he spent in Bihia and Rajgir. As we have seen, his life in the latter was one of semi-retirement, not one of complete seclusion. There is a tradition in a Hindu family of the Bihia area which says that the family nursed Sharafuddin back to health on one occasion when he was found in a very sick condition.[28] There is nothing improbable in the tradition.

Fortunately, we have clear evidence about how Sharafuddin left his cave in Rajgir and came to Bihar township.

Maulana Nizamuddin, whom Nizamuddin Auliya had made a spiritual successor, was in Bihar. By way of example, Nizamuddin Auliya used to give a cap to one and not to

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28. Abdalī, *Wasīlat-i Sharaf wa Dari'at-i-Daulat*, pp. 23-24.

another. He used to say: 'I don't deserve to sit on the carpet and make disciples. This is the work of others.'

It was this Nizamuddin Maula who became a friend and attendant of the Sheikh, (i.e. Sharafuddin). He used to go out in search of him on high ground and in distant places, where he found the Sheikh absorbed in his spiritual exercises. At that time there were some other followers of Nizamuddin Auliya in Bihar. They also used to collect around about Nizamuddin Maula. When the Revered Sheikh saw that these people underwent great trouble in coming out for his sake, he said: "You shouldn't involve yourselves in such hardships! If God so wills, on every Friday I will myself come to the town for the congregational prayer and we shall meet one another on that occasion."

The Sheikh did actually come to perform the Friday prayer from wherever he might happen to have been at the time. After the prayer, he remained in their company for some time and thereafter went out, while the others returned to their homes. For some time things continued in this fashion. Maulana Nizamuddin Maula saw the saintly personage had to undertake great trouble to come, and there was no fit place for him to stay. So it was that, outside the city, in the place where the hospice of the saint now stands, he set up a small tiled mud-hut. At the suggestion of this Maulana, the Revered Sheikh performed the Friday prayer and then came and remained there for some time. Occasionally he stayed for a day or two and then went away. Afterwards, it so happened that the aforesaid Maulana made a proposal to Majd-ul-Mulk, the governor of Bihar.

He said : "I have some money which is from a legally pure source. You might like to use it to make a proper house for the Revered Sheikh."

Thus it happened that the aforesaid governor raised an edifice in place of the hut. Afterwards, a feast was held. A number of people, including those followers of Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya, were invited. They all requested the Sheikh to sit on the prayer-carpet.

> After all this was finished, the Revered Sheikh turned his blessed face towards the followers of Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya and Maulana Nizamuddin Maula and said: "O my friends, your companionship with me has brought me to this level, amounting to installing me in an idol-temple."
>
> As long as the blessed feet of the saint possessed the strength, once or twice a month he would go outside. When his strength diminished, he was obliged to remain indoors. (*Ganj-i-Lā Yakhfā*, Pers. MS no. 3979, K.B.O.P.L., fol. 40 a & b)

This same material is presented in his biography (p. 133). There are a few differences: Here, it is Nizamuddin Maula; there, Nizamuddin Madani; Here, he makes the suggestion to build a small hut for the Sheikh; there, the friends make the suggestion; Here Sharafuddin says, "God willing, I'll come!" there, he simply says he will come; Here, there is no reference to the jungle's dangers; there, "this jungle, which is a fearful place, the abode of rapacious and fierce beasts," is mentioned. In view of the dependence of the biographer on Husain Mu'izz Balkhi, (the narrator of the above events), especially for the last days of Muzaffar Shams Balkhi in Aden (*Manāqib*, pp. 151-2), and of the facts here presented, it is clear that the excerpt quoted enjoys more than temporal precedence.

It is extremely important to notice that the initiative, on all occasions, came from others, chiefly the thoughtful Nizamuddin Maula, and that Sharafuddin acquiesced in their wishes. He could not refuse to see them when they had come so far to meet him. His next thought was that it would be easier for him to come to them rather than that they all come to him, for the number of those coming to meet him was on the increase. He could scarcely refuse to rest a little and talk to his friends in the small hut. The time spent there depended on how many people actually wanted to meet him. Only when all had met him would he be able to slip away. He would not remain just for the sake of remaining. Again, by the time the proper house was built for him, he had realized that this was where God wanted him to be, at the service of His people. He himself saw how many wanted to meet him, and how much God was using him.

to help people, so that he was, in fact, a Sheikh. This was formally recognized at the feast held to inaugurate his new residence, for "they all requested the Sheikh to sit on the prayer-carpet," i.e. to become the "Sajjadah Nashin" (the one who sits on the prayer-carpet). This is a common expression for a Sheikh. His remark showed that he clearly understood this. From now on, he was the "Revered Sheikh", and he quickly became the "Venerable Master".

When did all this take place? We derive some assistance from the account as it continues in his biography:

> When Sultan Muhammad Tughluq, the king of Delhi, heard that Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri had been many years in the jungle of Bihia and had lived a sequestered life there but nowadays was coming to town and mixing freely with the people, he wrote to Majd ul-Mulk, the governor of Bihar: (*Muqṭa'-i Bihār*).
>
> "A hospice is to be constructed for the Sheikh of Islam, Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri, and handed over to him, and Rajgir is to be endowed as the means of livelihood of those living in the hospice." He sent a Bulgharian prayer-carpet as a personal gift and wrote in his letter, "If he does not accept, use force to make him do so."
>
> Now this was Sultan Muhammad who was an extraordinary king. The people used to call him a tyrant, while he called himself a just man and used to say, "Whatever anyone is capable of, that is what I order of him."
>
> So, when the king's order reached Majd ul-Mulk, he took it to the Master of the World, Sheikh Sharafuddin, and said: How can I fail to comply with what he has written? Yet, if you refuse to accede to his wish, he will blame me for it, and you know how he is accustomed to act. God alone knows what he would do to me!"
>
> When he heard the entreaties of Majd ul-Mulk, he agreed, but most reluctantly.
>
> After the death of the Sultan came the reign of Sultan Firuz. He handed back the village. (*Manāqib*, pp. 134-5)

Sharafuddin's concern for Majd ul-Mulk is clearly stated as the reason for his acquiescence to the king's command. The time of his "handing back the village", (i.e. the letter authorizing its revenues for the hospice), needs to be rendered more precise, if possible. The account given here seems to imply that it was returned somewhat quickly, once the reason for its acceptance had disappeared along with the demise of Muhammad bin Tughluq in 1351.

More information is available, as recorded by Zain Badr Arabi. The reference is to the hospice constructed according to the orders of the Sultan.

> The edifice of the imposing hospice was completed. Malik Majd ul-Mulk made preparations for a feast according to his rank and position. He invited all who ate from the free kitchen, the Sufis and the disciples of Sheikh Nizamuddin (Maula). There was a musical session in the courtyard of the hospice, from the beginning of the assembly till the end. A separate residence, a cell with a portico attached, had been constructed for the Venerable Master. He was seated on the Bulgharian carpet which had been sent to him from Delhi by Sultan Muhammad...
>
> At this moment, an itinerant dervish, who happened to be present in the assembly, got up and came to the Venerable Master in his cell. The Venerable Master turned towards him and said:
>
> "This place and rank belong to you. Obedience to the reigning king had compelled me to accept it. This necessity had arisen because of the king's instructions to Malik Majd ul-Mulk. Whatever has come to me, including all these things, is due to the blessings of the dervishes. I am not worthy of Islam, so how could I consider myself worthy of this prayer-carpet?"
>
> The dervish replied: "Master, nobody recognizes you because of your hospice or prayer-carpet. Whoever recognizes you does so through God's grace. We have all come here by virtue of your inner blessing. Islam will become widely known and thrive here."

Upon hearing this, the Venerable Master said: "Whatever the dervishes say comes to pass." He then recited this hemistich,

Whatever the Sultan himself says comes to pass

(*Ma'dan* 61, p. 471)

It is clear that a large, imposing hospice had been constructed on orders from the king. Equally clear is the fact that it was in consideration of what might happen to the governor, Majd ul-Mulk, if he were to decline the king's grant, that moved Sharafuddin to accept it, even though he was most unwilling to comply. The separate structure mentioned in the last account was probably the one erected at the instance of Maulana Nizamuddin Maula. The dervish's statement that it was Sharafuddin's inner qualities, not his surroundings, that people respected and admired, was an echo of the general opinion.

One clue about the date of the construction of the hospice upon the receipt of the royal order is found in the correspondence of Husain Mu'izz Balkhi:

If in this respect there had been any fault or harm, my spiritual guide (i.e Sharafuddin)—may his secret be sanctified—would not have kept, for a period of fifteen years, a village. Do you mean to say that he had no trust, or that he was afraid of God's creatures, and that he abandoned it when the fear disappeared? (Chūn khauf raft, āngāh tark āward). (Husain 98, fol. 185a)

The difficulty is to determine either end of this period of time. On the evidence presented so far we would be inclined to argue back from 1351 A.D., the year of the death of Muhammad bin Tughluq and the accession of Firuz Shah. Working in lunar years this would take us back to 1337 A.D. This presupposes, however, that the grant was returned not long after the accession of Firuz Shah. The whole implication of the statement by Husain Mu'izz Balkhi—the second spiritual successor of Sharafuddin—is that 1337 is the possible date of the conferring of the grant along with the order to construct the hospice. Within a

year or two the large *khānqāh* was constructed, by 1340 A.D., at the latest. The years 1333-36 A.D. were spent in Bihia and in the cave at Rajgir. Professor Syed Hasan Askari suggests that the grant was returned by Sharafuddin when Firuz Shah visited him in Bihar.[29] This is a very plausible suggestion and deserves investigation, especially as Firuz Shah was in the province of Bihar in 1354 A.D. and 1360-61 A.D.

The latter date is simply out of the question, while the former would scarcely have left Sharafuddin open to the charge that he had accepted the grant because he was personally afraid of the Sultan and had returned it when he died. Besides, as is shown in appendix A, there is no proof of a meeting on this occasion. Hence, a quick return (i.e. in 1351 A.D.) seems to be the most reasonable possibility.

At this stage, we turn to a most enlightening piece of information recorded on the 10th of the eleventh month of 760 A.H. (1359) related by Zain Badr Arabi:

> This very day Sheikh Bukhari—may God have mercy upon him—has passed from the labours of this world to the abode of the mercy of the Lord. He was a very distinguished disciple. Indeed, I have heard that he was the very first to seek discipleship from the Venerable Master of the Worlds. (i.e. Sharafuddin).
>
> The Revered Master himself led the funeral prayers offered on his behalf. After the prayers were completed, he accompanied him with an overflowing heart to the burial-ground while the other disciples walked beside the bier. Standing there, he had him buried. When the grave-diggers requested the bystanders to help them by throwing a handful of earth into the grave, he picked up a little, recited something, blew upon it and threw it into the grave.
>
> As he did so, this much came into the hearing of this Helpless One "and not those who have strayed. Amen". That

29. S. H. Askari, "Sufic Hagiographical Works," *JBRS*, vol. LII, 1966, p. 152, footnote 25.

was the end. He blew upon the earth and threw it into the grave. Thus it was clear that he had recited the opening chapter of The Book (the Qur'an), and then blown.

When he returned home, he sat down upon his sanctified carpet. Most of the disciples were present. He told them all to sit down. They did so. Afterwards he said: "My Sheikh Bukhari has gone! In this very house, is there anything he has left undone? Indeed, he has been under my guidance for some thirty years (sī chand sāl zīr-i man ast). (*Yafnā*, date cited, p. 44)

It is obvious that Sharafuddin was deeply moved on the occasion of the death of his first disciple, a man who had spent "some thirty years" with him. The "Helpless One" was none other than Zain Badr Arabi, as is clear from the preface to the work cited. He reports that he "had heard" that Sheikh Bukhari was the very first disciple of Sharafuddin. A mathematical thirty would take us back to 1330 A.D. This seems to be too early, if Sharafuddin stayed in Delhi until the death of Najibuddin. While it is possible that Bukhari had become a disciple in Bihia, the Rajgir period seems more probable. This would mean the end of 1333 A.D. more or less, as the earliest date. This would fall within tolerable limits for the interpretation of the phrase, "some thirty years" by a man whose attention was not fixed on mathematical precision, for his heart was filled with grief at the loss of "my Sheikh Bukhari"—a term of considerable endearment:

It is worth studying carefully the accounts of how Sharafuddin moved to Bihar. He began by remaining with the small group of followers of Nizamuddin Auliya for an hour or two after the Friday prayers and then departed. It is mentioned that this situation continued for some time. Only then did the question of his staying there for the night arise. A small hut was constructed on the site of the hospice. With a place to stay, he occasionally remained for a day or two, if people wished to meet him. Afterwards a proposal to build a better place for Sharafuddin was made by Nizamuddin Maula. This was his own personal quarters, a cell with a portico, while it was the

main hospice (khānqāh) which was constructed by Majd ul-Mulk on orders of the Sultan. This was finished and opened when Zain Badr Arabi was already present, for he records the event in his *Ma'dan ul-Ma'āni*. His account makes it clear that, although this was the formal installation, so to say, of Sharaf-uddin, he was already an acknowledged Sheikh, holding regular assemblies, and also having a number of disciples already gathered around him.

This whole process took some years. It is not possible to say exactly how many.

DEATH

The years spent in his Sufi centre on the outskirts of Bihar town, from approximately 1337 A.D. onwards, were outwardly devoid of adventure and excitement for Sharafuddin, but were rich in personal growth; ever-deepening union with God; and an unstinted service of the countless numbers of people who came to see him. Sharafuddin, the man, shines through the literary production of these years and forms the subject of the second part of this work. The quiet passage of time leaves its mark on him. He is gradually forced to cut out the walks he enjoyed so much, for his legs gave him trouble. We also find him being carried in a palanquin towards the end of his life. His eyesight also gave him trouble, possibly due to cataract, and he suffered, from time to time, from flatulence. We find references to people offering him medicines to relieve this last-mentioned ailment. Finally, his rich and enriching life drew to its completion.

Sharafuddin was about ninety years of age when the inevitable day dawned. It was a bright, sunny winter's day, Wednesday, 2nd January, 1381. There is a full account of this last day in the *Wafāt Nāma* (*Death Account*) from the pen of the ever-faithful Zain Badr Arabi. (See Appendix B for the full account).

Sharafuddin was up, sitting on his prayer-carpet, on a portico, after the morning prayer. His younger brother, Sheikh

Jaliluddin, his special attendant, and many others were present, among whom was Qazi Shamsuddin, the recipient of the famous *Hundred Letters*. Sharafuddin told the bystanders that Satan had made a last-minute attempt to make him waver in his faith, but to no avail.

As he was feeling the chill of the shaded portico, and the courtyard looked invitingly warm, bathed in winter sunshine, he came into it some time before noon. He supported himself on a cushion.

There now began a series of farewells. He held out his hand and took hold of that of Qazi Shamsuddin. After holding it affectionately for some time, he let it go. He did the same to Qazi Zahid. He then beckoned them, kissing each one on the hand and on the beard.

Qazi Shamsuddin came and sat beside him. When asked if he had anything to say about him, Sharafuddin said: "What can I say about him? He is my son! How often in my letters I referred to him as my son or brother."

Sharafuddin's brother, Jalil, was sitting at his side. He was showing signs of the strain of the impending death of his revered brother. Sharafuddin felt this and assured him he would never be abandoned by scholars and dervishes.

Many came forward to receive a word of blessing and a gesture of affection. Among them was Qazi Nuruddin, the brother of Qazi Shamsuddin. Sharafuddin took his hand and, with great affection, rubbed it on his face, beard, cheek and hand, and exclaimed, "Ah! Ah!" and kissed him, saying: "You have been very much in my company and have rendered me great service. I am happy with you."

More people came forward, including old Fatuha, the supervisor of the kitchen, who could not contain his tears. "Poor Fatuha belongs to me, as he always has," said Sharafuddin.

At the time for the noon prayer he assumed an attitude of great humility and offered his prayers. Soon afterwards he

listened, in a very respectful posture, to the recital of some Quranic verses by a young lad. The boy grew nervous on account of the solemnity of the occasion and it was Sharaf-uddin himself who prompted his agitated memory.

For the last time he performed the requisite ablutions and recited two rounds of ritual prayer on his own prayer-mat. The effort weakened him, and he lay down to rest. The sun was dipping in the west and the courtyard, now in shadow, was growing chilly, so he was moved back to the portico, where he rested upon a tiger-skin. At the time of the sunset prayer, he allowed himself to be shifted to a wooden bed.

There he turned his whole attention to God, and died at the time for night prayer. He was buried the following morning in a grave situated next to that of his mother.

His last hours had revealed his deep, respectful union with God, and the affectionate love he had for those who had come to learn from him and be of service to him. Sad indeed must they all have felt at the loss of such a Master whose love and affection had brought such joy to their hearts!

PART TWO

3

THE MAN

Having seen something about the more eventful aspects of Sharafuddin's life and edifying death, we are able to glean much about the man himself by perusing the literature produced at his Sufi centre during the last forty years of his life. Various aspects of his personality come to light as we study the way in which he dealt with various classes of people, the reactions of people to him, and his attitudes in areas where Sufis themselves differed.

Dealings with Relatives

Very little is known about his father, Yahya Maneri, except his immediate lineage and his spiritual guide. The unsupported story, found in *Manāqib ul-Asfiyā*, of his not having read his father's letters while he was in Sonargaon, has little to commend it in view of the portrait of Sharafuddin given in the pages of this work. We cannot accept the lack of filial respect and affection implied in such a story for, if Sharafuddin grew so fond of Abu Tau'ama, his teacher, we can imagine what his affection for his own father must have been like! Unfortunately no firm evidence is available at the moment. His father undoubtedly died before he returned to Maner.

His mother, Bibi Razia,[1] gave him permission to leave her a second time in search of a spiritual guide. Much as she would have liked to have him close to her, she perceived that the yearning which had taken possession of his being could not be assuaged except by the very Source of life. She, who had so tenderly guided his first, halting steps as a child, and who had instilled a sense of God in him during his tenderest years, had inaugurated a process that now soared far above what she could offer, so she bade him good-bye.

The next solid evidence we have of his dealings with his mother is the fact that she had come along to his hospice in Bihar, bringing his son, Zakiuddin, along with her (*Ma'dan* 12, p. 113). Most likely the initiative for this move, which probably dates from the early forties, came from his mother, and he acceded to her request, for this would present him with an opportunity to be of service to her with all the affection of a loving son. Still, it seems that he expected her to follow the customs of the hospice, as the following story, related by Professor Askari,[2] indicates:

> Once his aged mother received a near kinsman from Maner as her guest and, forgetting the injunction of her saintly son, lit the fire in her house in the daytime. The sudden appearance of the saint on seeing the smoke awakened her to the reality of the situation, and she sent out the things along with the guest to someone else.

Her death occurred in Bihar town, about 1344 A.D., as the following excerpt indicates:

> Khwaja Mahmud Awaz, revenue officer for the province of Bihar, on the second day after the death of the revered mother of the Venerable Master, was present in the august assembly. (*Ma'dan* 36, p. 298)

She was buried at a little distance from the hospice, at the site of the present 'dargāh'. Her saintly son was buried next to her on 3 January, 1381.

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1. Zamiruddin, *Sīrat ush-Sharaf*, p. 24.
2. S.H. Askari, "Sufism in Medieval Bihar," *PUJ*, vol. xii, 1958, p. 81.

There is a reference to Sharafuddin's visit to the tomb of his mother on the night of the feast of *Shab-i-Barāt*, (Night of the Divine Decrees), in 775 A.H. (29th January, 1374).

> After prayers, the Venerable Master was taken by palanquin on account of the weakness of old-age to the graveyard. All the disciples and devotees who were present in the assembly accompanied him, including this Helpless One (i.e. the compiler, Salah Mukhlis Daud Khani), who hoped that the Master would see the raised terrace and dome he had constructed to adorn the grave of the Master's mother and thus gain a reward in both worlds. He walked along as a bearer of the palanquin.
>
> The Venerable Master alighted at that very spot and entered the enclosure. He sat down near the grave of his mother. When the visit was over, he simply showered his affection on this hopeful one. Afterwards, he went on foot to the graves of those dear to him which were situated behind the place for prayer. He went around, offering prayers on their behalf.
>
> When he returned home, and everyone had gone home too, he summoned this poor one and, removing his blessed turban, placed it upon my head. He showed his affection in many other ways which cannot be described, and said, "Salahuddin has built a palace! (*Mūnis* 12, pp. 25-6)

It scarce need be said that Sharafuddin was greatly touched by the honour shown to his mother by Salah Mukhlis Daud Khani! His reaction shows his deep affection for her.

His son, Zakiuddin, was also in the hospice for some time, as already noted. In the three references to him noticed in the twelfth chapter of *Ma'dan ul-Ma'ānī* he is each time depicted as going through some book when he comes across a difficulty which his father solves for him. He would have been in his twenties at the time, and probably got married shortly afterwards for he does not appear again. From the meagre evidence at hand, it would be hard to put forward a case for Sharafuddin's special affection for his son. Rather, he seems to have taken as

much care of him as he did of others who were studying under his guidance. We find more evidence of his paternal instincts in the way he taught Qazi Ashrafuddin's little nephew his first reading lesson.

There is not really enough evidence to say anything further about his dealings with Zakiuddin's mother.

Dealings with Muzaffar Shams Balkhi

Sharafuddin's biographer describes how Muzaffar was attracted to him:

> Muzaffar's father, Sheikh Shamsuddin, was a spiritual successor of Sheikh Ahmad Charmposh. Muzaffar used to say: "Sheikh Ahmad is a great man, capable of doing many marvellous things, but my faith can find repose only in a man who is outstanding in knowledge."
>
> In those days the fame of the Master of the world, Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri, for his learning in the four fields of Law, the Path, Reality and Mystical Knowledge, had spread far and wide. He felt attracted to the Master of the World but, out of respect for his father, had delayed in doing anything about it.
>
> When he finally asked his father about the matter, he replied: "The decision is up to you. Direct your attention to wherever you feel satisfied." After this, he came to the Revered Master of the World. He asked questions and posed his intellectual difficulties. (*Manāqib* p. 148)

All this rings true. From Muzaffar's writings, including his profuse marginal notes on his own personal copy of *The Hundred Letters*, available to us in the Balkhi manuscript, we know that he was a highly intelligent man. Hence it is perfectly reasonable that he should express a desire to become the disciple of a scholar-guide. The account continues:

> The Master of the World gave him satisfactory replies. Even though, proud of his learning, he often exclaimed, "I don't

> agree!" the Master, in his dealings with him, never spoke a hot word but, in clear terms, solved his difficulties (*Manāqib*, p. 148).

We shall see, shortly, that this is a somewhat idealized account of Sharafuddin's dealings with Muzaffar. It continues thus:

> At the end of the session, he felt sorry for the bold way he had spoken, and was very much taken by the behaviour of the Master. After that, his heart not merely went out to the Master, but was also smitten by love for him as a guide —something which comes from the grace of God Almighty!

We notice that it was Sharafuddin's behaviour, not his clever replies, that won over Muzaffar's heart. It is most important to notice that "his heart was smitten by love for him as a guide." This, for Sharafuddin, is of prime importance. The account continues:

> The Master honoured him by granting him discipleship. After this, he asked for training along the path called the Way.
>
> The Master said: "This cannot be acquired without knowledge. Whatever knowledge you have acquired was for the sake of rank and position. You didn't obtain a number of its fruits. Return to your studies with sincerity of purpose, doing them for God's sake. Be thorough, so as to be granted fruit in abundance which would be the cause of making progress along the Way."
>
> That large-hearted disciple did just as he was bidden. He set out that very hour on foot. After travelling for some miles, his feet broke out in blisters. He was unable to keep on going. He had settled down beneath a tree when a nobleman, a disciple of the Revered Master of the World, who was on his way to Delhi for some work, arrived beneath the very same tree. He recognized him and asked him where he was going. The Venerable Sheikh Muzaffar explained his situation to him. The nobleman rejoiced at once and gave

him a horse to ride and conducted him with more care and attention right up to Delhi. There he went off to attend to his own affairs and Sheikh Muzaffar became engrossed in studies.

He started from the beginning. For a period of two years he was in quest of knowledge of God. During that period, Sultan Firuz had a palace constructed. He chose Sheikh Muzaffar to teach in this school. He was not eager to do so, but agreed because of the authority of the one who wished it. So, his days were occupied in teaching in this school.

There is supportive evidence for this, which must have been in the early years of the reign of Firuz Shah, which began in 1351. Husain Mu'izz Balkhi writes:

> I have heard this from the Revered Sheikh (i.e. Muzaffar) "Sheikh Nasiruddin Mahmud, successor of Nizamuddin Auliya, sent for the letters of my Sheikh and he spent a considerable time in perusing them.
>
> Afterwards he had the volume transcribed and then returned the original to me, with the comment that 'This Revered Sheikh has thrown my Islam into the dust:" (*Husain* 55, fol. 134 b)

Muzaffar lent his own copy of the *Hundred Letters* of his Sheikh, Sharafuddin, to Nasiruddin, who returned them to him, after having had them transcribed, with the above comment. Obviously, he borrowed them from Muzaffar while he was in Delhi. As Nasiruddin died in 1356 A.D. this incident took place in the early fifties. After the events narrated by his biographer above, one day something extraordinary happened:

> Suddenly, some minstrels appeared and began to sing. Sheikh Muzaffar was overcome by ecstasy. At once he flung himself down from the palace. Almighty God protected him, and he wasn't injured.
>
> In that condition, he ransacked his house and set out for Bihar. He came to the Master of the World. For high-minded disciples he prescribes something commensurate to

their aspirations. The sign of divine wisdom in this instance was that, in the very place where he had acquired learning, there everything was shattered, and he considered himself the most ignorant of all men. When he sincerely sought God, he rescued him from the abode of calamity, which is an iron chain. Proficient spiritual guides prescribe various works for their disciples according to their particular condition.

(*Manāqib*, p. 149)

This somewhat startling behaviour is not surprising for anyone who has become acquainted with Muzaffar. His was a restless spirit! An undoubted genius, he lacked the serenity that more and more characterized the behaviour of his guide, Sharafuddin.

The big question at this stage is this: Whose interpretation are we dealing with? Are these the reflections of the biographer himself, or is he here relying on somebody else? The present writer is of the opinion that this narrative and its interpretation came to the biographer through Husain Mu'izz Balkhi, Muzaffar's nephew and successor, who was with him for so many years, and upon whom the *Manāqib ul-Aṣfiyā* relies heavily in its treatment of Muzaffar. It is even possible that Husain is transmitting Muzaffar's own interpretation of Sharafuddin's purpose in sending him back to Delhi, for the interpretation itself is extremely perspicacious. It also has the historical merit of confirming the fact that Muzaffar had already completed a course of studies in Delhi before he came to Bihar, approached Sharafuddin and was sent back to Delhi for further studies. His previously acquired scholarship is also confirmed by his appointment, after two years, in Firuz Shah's madrasa, for that would not be a sufficiently long enough period to acquire the knowledge required for a royal appointment.

Having prepared the ground, Sharafuddin begins to sow the seed in Muzaffar, as the biographer—on the evidence ef Husain Mu'izz Balkhi—continues: "I have heard that the Master of the World ordered Muzaffar to attend to the needs of the inmates of the hospice. He happily did so. He accomplished whatever the inmates told him to do. He did not consider whether it was

a noble or demeaning task. If his clothes got torn, he used to sew or tie the pieces together.

One day, the Master saw that his clothes were completely torn. He looked very shabby indeed yet, in spite of this constriction, he was content. He recited this couplet about his condition:

I am content with the wealth of poverty and the kingdom of solitude,
For then the attention of none is upon my affairs.

The Master said: "Bring out some fine clothes for Maulana Muzaffar and prepare a pleasant place for him in which he may be able to become engrossed in prayer. Give him some fine, soft clothes and also prepare many kinds of delicious food for him."

The attendants did as they were bidden, but he was so engrossed in the love of God Almighty and in seeking Him that he considered all these things to be so many thorns along his way.

The secret of real poverty was revealed to him. He no longer cared about all these things. While in this state, he exclaimed:

When Adam's soul was singed by the secret of poverty.
He sold the eight heavens for a grain of wheat.

It is related that while he was thus engrossed in the upper story, one day he stood up to stretch his limbs. The Master's glance fell upon him. He saw that there was no flesh left on his body. He was all skin and bone. The Master turned towards Qazi Zahid and said:

"Zahid, do you see how thoroughly reformed Maulana 'I don't agree' has become?" He showered many kinds of rewards and abundant favours upon him.

It was heard that, when he emerged from his period of retirement, he presented himself to the Master and said: "I

have been sitting in retirement, yet my heart still remembered a certain person—my wife! What, then, is the profit of my sitting in recollection?"

The Master apparently gave no reply. Muzaffar sat there for some time. Then he said: "I shall divorce her!"

When the Master heard him say this, he said: 'You have no further need of retirement. You have completed your training. You may go whenever you like to wherever you wish. It is all the same for you."

On account of his high resolve he was able to flourish and give himself completely to the task. He became the beloved of the heart of his guide. It is said that guides are in search of disciples in whom they may see themselves mirrored. (*Manāqib*, p. 149)

In addition to noticing the sustained high quality of the narrative and of its elucidatory remarks, such as the final ones, we can distinguish three stages in Sharafuddin's training of Muzaffar: humble service of his fellow-men; relentlessly seeking God in solitude; learning to discern the movements of his own heart, leading to a magnanimous resolution to abandon the one thing he still clung to during his period of solitude—his wife!

It should be noticed how gently Sharafuddin treated Muzaffar, offering him all sorts of delicacies. It was Muzaffar himself who spurned them all and took so whole-heartedly to asceticism, prayer and renunciation. It should be pointed out that Muzaffar's training was complete the very moment he made the decision to abandon the only thing he found himself still clinging to apart from God—his wife. It would be quite unjustified to go on and say that Sharafuddin asked him to actually leave his wife. Having elicited the response he was looking for, Sharafuddin proclaimed Muzaffar was a free man and could do whatever he liked. A spiritual guide who required his disciple to divorce his wife would be very suspect indeed, and such a charge cannot be levelled against Sharafuddin. If

Muzaffar afterwards decided to divorce his wife, that was his own affair, it was definitely not a requirement of his spiritual training.

As mentioned previously, the portrait of Sharafuddin's early dealings with the argumentative young Muzaffar is somewhat idealized as the following, extremely precious incident shows. It is taken from *Ganj-i Lā Yakhfā*, a collection of Husain's discourses.

> Afterwards he (Husain Mu'izz (concerning Balkhi) said: "There was a controversy on this point (the created or uncreated nature of the Qur'an) between the deceased Revered Sheikh Muzaffar and Maulana Nizam, who had with him Maulana Alam and the learned men of Bihar.
>
> Sheikh Muzaffar was saying that what is heard, memorized, spoken and written is, in reality, the very Creative Word itself, without any doubt.
>
> They did not agree. They said that it signified the Creative Word, but was distinct from it. When the debate grew heated, these words slipped off the tongue of the deceased Sheikh: 'What do you understand? Even your teachers didn't understand!'
>
> These words of his upset them very much. They drew up a complaint. They sent Maulana Khuju to call the Sheikh. The deceased Sheikh Muzaffar wrote an exposition of his views on the topic and presented it to the Revered Sheikh of the World (i.e. Sharafuddin). He said: 'The scholars of Bihar have drawn up a complaint. Maulana Khuju was sent to call me. If you give the order, I shall go and reply to them.'
>
> The Revered Sheikh read what he had written. He then said: 'Maulana, have you come here to become a Muslim or to argue?' He then tore his exposition to pieces, and said, 'Go and tell them, 'You don't understand,' and added, 'Go on, draw up a complaint!'

When they heard that the Revered Sheikh had become angry, they withdrew their complaint. Qazi Yahya came before the Revered Sheikh and begged his pardon, saying, 'They called him, I didn't!'

The dispute occurred at a time when Maulana Nizamuddin and Qazi Alam had to go to Delhi. They told the Delhi Masters about it. They also said the matter should be understood as the Revered Sheikh had said.

Afterwards, when they returned from Delhi, Usman, a spiritual representative of the Revered Sheikh Nasir, came to Bihar. He wrote a treatise on the subject of the 'The Word.' He called them, saying, 'Come, let's have a discussion. I'll answer your difficulties.'

They sent this reply, 'This problem has been solved for us.' Sayyid Zahiruddin and his friends, however, remained unconvinced. They were not fully satisfied.

Afterwards he said: "This matter is also well understood in this group in accordance with the words of Ain ul-Quzat who has said: 'The edifice of the Last Things is built upon allegory, and cannot be understood except allegorically.'" (*Yakhfā* 41, f. 65a & b)

The incident reveals Muzaffar's intellectual pride before he was moved to Delhi as part of his training. That is the most natural setting for the incident. It shows that the Master did actually use "hot words" with Muzaffar, at least on this occasion, and this is why it is so precious. We also notice that he spoke sarcastically to him, and also indicated his displeasure by angrily tearing his little treatise to shreds. He even had an ironical word for his opponents.

We are told of the electrifying effect of all this on those opponents—they hurriedly withdrew their complaint, and Qazi Yahya came to excuse himself. We are left to infer the effect on Muzaffar himself. It must have been quite considerable, for the Master's words and actions clearly manifested his displeasure at Muzaffar's intellectual vanity. In addition to his

natural brilliance, he prided himself on his "Delhi training," and it was his disparaging remark about his opponents' teachers, implying that they were "country bumpkins," as well as lacking in intelligence, that really raised a hornet's nest! It even succeeded in arousing the ire of the Venerable Master—further proof of how insulting Muzaffar's remarks were considered to be! It seems that the whole incident remained imprinted in Muzaffar's emotive system, for our narrator, Husain Mu'izz Balkhi, his nephew and spiritual successor, would have heard of it later on, probably related emotionally, for we can still sense some of this emotion in his own account. We would date the incident about 1351. The Nasir mentioned was Nasiruddin Mahmud Chiragh Dehlavi, who died in 1356.

The incident is also important for its revelation of Sharafuddin's strong objection to theological disputes which arouse passions but remain sterile in terms of progress in the spiritual life. This does not mean that he was against theological discussion—the whole body of literature devoted to recording his discourses belies such a suggestion—but only that he was against sterile debate, as in the present instance. His reaction to Muzaffar's behaviour was swift and decisive—there was no mistaking his anger ! Yet it was appropriate, as its fruitful impact on Muzaffar testifies, and this fact underscores its essential goodness. It is a false spirituality which attempts to banish anger from human nature. A sane one, however, aims at teaching people how to express their anger constructively, not destructively. This assertion is in full accord with Sharafuddin's own teaching, as he outlines it in the letter devoted to "Erroneous Opinions":

> It is ignorance and foolishness to think that the Law has enjoined the complete extirpation of desires and other human tendencies. The ideal should not be considered in terms of such extremes! Nothing of the sort is commanded. The Prophet of Islam has himself said: 'I am a man. I get angry.' Indeed, they often saw signs of anger on his face ! (*100 Letters* 18, p. 75)

An extremely important source of information about Sharafuddin's concern for Muzaffar is his correspondence with

him. The first thing to notice is its volume. One indication of this is found in the preface of the anonymous compiler of a small collection of Sharafuddin's letters to Muzaffar known as *The Twenty-Eight Letters*:

> You should know that the story of these few yet precious letters herein attached is as follows:
>
> Over the space of twenty-five years, the Sheikh of Islam, the Master of the Worlds, the Honour of God, of the Law and the Religion (i.e. Sharafuddin), continually sent replies to the questions raised by the deceased Sheikh Muzaffar. As postscript in a number of letters, the following was written: "In these letters of mine, I have offered solutions for your difficulties and affairs. They should not be shown to anybody, for that would result in the disclosure of divine secrets."
>
> For this reason, whenever the disciples asked permission to make copies of the letters for the common welfare then, even though he was kindness itself, he showed them to nobody. He used to send them under seal. The writer of these lines has seen those letters, equalling more than two hundred.
>
> When the time of his death arrived, the deceased Sheikh Muzaffar made a will stipulating that they should be buried along with him, inside his shroud.
>
> Out of respect for this explicit wish, all the letters were placed inside the shroud so that those hidden secrets of the great man remained forever concealed.
>
> One small bundle of letters, in the hand of the Sheikh of Islam, remained in the letter-bag. It now lies before mə, one of his well-wishers. These few letters have been copied from it so that they might be of benefit for the faith of those who read them or listen to them. (pp. 301-2)

This preface, in addition to stating that Sharafuddin wrote more than 200 letters to Muzaffar alone, also indicates the intimate nature of these letters by referring to the "divine

secrets" contained in them, and which were not to be revealed. We have no knowledge of any such proviso having been made in connection with any other letters, not even in the *Ajwabah-i Kākavī* (Answers to Kākavi), for quotations are made, by Sharafuddin's biographer, from this work. (*Manāqib* p. 146). Hence, even that collection, as well as all the others, was meant for public consumption. (The significance of the collection referred to will become apparent when we deal with the addressee, Izz Kākavi.)

This notable contrast highlights the special regard Sharafuddin had for Muzaffar, as well as his high esteem for his attainments, particularly in the field of scholarship, for he usually addresses him as "Maulana" or, even more significantly, as "Imam".

It is not very difficult to guess who the "writer of these lines" is—none other than Muzaffar's nephew and successor, Husain Mu'izz Balkhi, who was present with him in Aden when he breathed his last in that far-distant spot. This is clear from *Manāqib ul-Aṣfiyā*.

When Sheikh Muzaffar's last journey approached and weariness began to overpower him, he bequeathed to the Revered Sheikh of Islam, Sheikh Husain, his own brother's son, the indications of God's mercy (i.e. various sacred relics) and many kinds of blessings from himself and his spiritual forebears.

He bade him farewell and said: "Go to Bihar!"

He replied: "There are many spiritual guides there. What could I do there to make any impression?"

He said: "O God, when you lift your head, I won't have any secrets left." He gave him further pieces of advice and became immersed in God. In that condition, he passed from this temporal abode to the eternal one. He was buried in Aden itself. (*Manāqib*, p. 152)

Evidence of the writer's long and intimate association with Muzaffar, in addition to his presence at his death-bed, is stam-

ped on the preface. Husain immediately comes to mind. He would have naturally taken charge of all arrangements for his burial and for disposing of his personal effects. He, of all people, would have been most "in the know" of those precious letters, and he, above all, would have been the most curious to read their contents! Yet he was an obedient and faithful disciple who knew clearly what his spiritual guide's will was, and he wanted to respect his wishes and those of the "Sheikh of Islam", Sharafuddin Maneri. So he obediently buried the letters, but simply could not resist the temptation to save some for posterity! Although he tries to give the impression that one small bundle was "accidentally" not buried along with the others, this is unacceptable, for the explicit wish expressed by Sharafuddin, given extra weight by the stipulation of Muzaffar's will, was such a weighty injunction as to preclude such an "accident" from occurring. Husain's action was a fruitful expression of human frailty. Indeed, the present writer would find little difficulty in forgiving Husain if he had been even less scrupulous than he was, for he has obviously only preserved a "remnant" of the body of the correspondence. The writer admits he "has seen those letters, equalling more than two hundred." That "seeing" included reading also, at least rapidly, must be inferred from his statement about a postscript "in a number of letters", for the evidence for such a statement is not found in the twenty-eight letters he presents to the reader. By reflecting on the contents of this postscript—which would indicate that the letter probably contained something "sensitive"—and on the basic wish to keep hidden the "divine secrets", we are led to conclude that all such letters were consigned to Muzaffar's shroud, while the ones that were "accidentally" preserved did not contain Sharafuddin's most intimate disclosures.

It is not possible to present a full study of these letters at this stage. The few excerpts here presented are meant to help the reader get a 'feel' of Sharafuddin's attitude to Muzaffar.

> My brother, the way to the most Holy and Exalted God does not lie in the sky or upon the earth, in the eas ort

the west. No, the way to the Most Holy and Exalted God is within you! (*28 Letters* 4, p. 306)

My dearest brother, Imam Muzaffar, greetings and blessings from the author of these lines, Sharaf Yahya Maneri!

I gave you my full attention as long as you were relating what was befalling you. Each event brought a different noise and disturbance in its train. What could be expected to appear from such noise and disturbance? God willing, all will work out well! . . .

I have read all those portions of the *Sharḥ-i Mashāriq* which you have put down in black and white. They were agreeable to me, for they contain much meaningful matter.

It is not possible to become engrossed with every sort of thing, nature and state contained therein, for knowledge is all-absorbing. So, be careful and realize what you are about. Lay aside knowledge in order that you might have a good end. (*28 Letters* 12, pp. 315-6)

We don't know the details of what was disturbing Muzaffar, but he must certainly have been encouraged by Sharafuddin's words. We also notice the delicate manner in which Sharafuddin combines praise for Muzaffar's commentary (sharḥ) on the famous collection of Traditions, *Mashāriq ul-Anwār*, with a word of warning about getting too engrossed in intellectual pursuits! He is reminded never to lose sight of what life is ultimately all about—attaining "a good end".

This third and final excerpt should be allowed to speak for itself:

Most dear brother, Imam Muzaffar, greetings and blessings from this nobody, Sharaf Maneri! Study this letter and rest assured of my concern for you, for I don't want to see your work being marred in any way, or that anything which might hinder or impede it should come in the way. I eagerly read your detailed letter when it arrived. Thanks be to God, all had turned out well, just as I had hoped it would!

> Whatever news I heard about you, or you yourself had written, was all concerned with stations and meanings based on Apostolic Tradition and the Path of the pilgrims and wayfarers, thanks be to God!
>
> O brother, my hope is that all your works might be in conformity with this Way, and that they might increase day by day. Nevertheless, anyone who travels along this Way will have to face many kinds of trials in the form of manifestations and miracles. Account them all as idols and sacred-threads. . .
>
> Another Way has been opened up for you, thanks be to God! Strange and wonderful things will appear from the angelic world, burdens too heavy to be borne by earth or sky! Yet the heart, like a mirror, can do so, just as Rakhsh could bear the weight of Rustam. (*28 Letters* 16, p. 319)

Before bidding adieu to these precious indications of Sharafuddin's affection and concern for Muzaffar, it is worth taking note of the period of the correspondence mentioned in the preface, twenty-five years. This means that it began about 1356 A.D., for Sharafuddin died in 1381 A.D. It seems more reasonable to presume that this correspondence began when Muzaffar was in a position to profit from it, and when Sharafuddin would have been moved to address him as "brother" i.e., after his training was complete and he was told he was free to go wherever he liked, whenever he wished. This would confirm the chronology arrived at by different argumentation, namely, a date like late 1351 A.D. for his going to Delhi. There he studied for two years and then began to teach for Firuz Shah. We would consider late 1354 A.D. as the probable date of his return to Bihar. If we allow about a year for the training process described, this would mean it was completed by late 1355 A.D. or so when he left Bihar and began his wanderings, and also took to letter-writing. Husain – whom we identify as the anonymous compiler – would have been in a position to make the statement about the period of twenty-five years.

It is also possible that this is the explanation for the assertion, in *Mūnis ul-Qulūb*, a compilation of the discourses of

Ahmad Langar Dariya (d. 1486 A.D.), referred to by S.H. Askari,[3] that Sharafuddin himself went to Delhi and personally returned the royal grant to Firuz Shah. Professor Askari goes on to reject this assertion, and insists that there was only one trip to Delhi.[4] The present writer agrees with both these contentions but wishes to add the suggestion that this statement possibly represents a garbled form of Muzaffar's journey to Delhi.

Dealings with other Disciples

One striking feature of Sharafuddin's whole manner of dealing with his disciples is the complete lack of any evidence that would suggest any attempt, on his part, to play the role of "lord and master". There is no attempt to manipulate people, to force them to agree with his opinions or to get them to do things they don't want to do. In modern jargon, he does not use any "brain-washing" techniques, nor does he assume any of the postures of a whole spectrum of religious leadership visible on the contemporary scene. On the contrary, Sharafuddin's whole attitude can best be summarized as one founded fairly and squarely on the service of others, an attitude beautifully expressed in the words spoken to a little four-year-old boy: "Permit me to be of service to you!" (*Ma'dan* 6, p. 42). Later on, his favourite way of expressing this attitude was "bringing comfort to hearts", a phrase which keeps on recurring.

It was Sharafuddin's readiness to serve rather than be served that prompted him to volunteer to come into Bihar each Friday and thus make it unnecessary for Maulana Nizamuddin Maula and others to go to Rajgir. This same attitude induced him to accede to the repeated requests of Qazi Shamsuddin that he should write something to help him as he was unable to attend the assemblies in Bihar. It also moved him to agree to check Zain Badr Arabi's collection of his own discourses, and even

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3. S.H. Askari, "Sufic Hagiographical Works," JBRS, vol. LII, 1966, p. 151, footnote 24.
4. *Idem.*

to embellish them. The pattern running through all these episodes is that others have a need which he meets. The present writer, after noticing this trend in Sharafuddin's dealings with his disciples, began to wonder why he had undertaken his major work, the writing of a detailed commentary on a famous manual called *Ādāb ul-Murīdīn* (Rules for Sufi Novices). The unspoken presumption was that he must surely have been the initiator of such a comprehensive work, covering more than 500 folios in one manuscript, and that it was an attempt to make his mark as a Sufi author.

Fortunately, we have an account of how this work came to be written, supplied for us in the preface itself.

> After all this praise comes the name of the writer of this book, the *Maṭālib ut-Ṭālib*, who hopes in God's mercy, Muhammad bin Muhammad 'Isa ul-Balkhi, alias Ashraf bin Rukn, the transcriber of this book—may God heal him of all internal sickness, and may he never be deprived of his Sheikh's love and abundant kindness and affection!
>
> Some days ago, I saw the corrected copy of *Ādāb ul-Murīdīn*. It had extraordinary marginal notes which were capable of leading anyone, even those merely standing and sitting, in the direction of heaven. When I became acquainted with their meaning and understood their serious import, I made up my mind to write out some—nay, all—so that all, whether they be great men or ordinary people, might benefit from them.
>
> It then crossed my mind that anybody who decides to do anything on his own initiative should obtain permission from his Sheikh to do so, in order that everything might turn out well, for the Sheikh occupies the same position among his disciples as the Prophet did among his followers.
>
> So I presented myself before him, (i.e. Sharafuddin), kneeling there respectfully. He turned towards me. I requested him, on my own and my friends' behalf, to allow me to make use of the marginal notes which he himself liked, and to give his considered opinion upon the subject.

He replied to my request and, in his gracious kindness, acceded to it. He began with a literal translation (i.e. from Arabic into Persian) and then explained the notes and dictated the material in that fashion. He freed me from relying on the help of others. He dictated everything, from the beginning to the end, word by word, line by line, leaf by leaf and part by part, according to the understanding of the one who was listening and writing it all down, i.e. according to the nuances of meaning which occurred to his illuminated heart at different times.

Sometimes he dictated continuously for days together, but at other times it so happened that, on account of the crowd of visitors and his preoccupation with God, months passed without any dictation.

The work began on the morning of Friday, in the month of Rabi' ul-Awwal, in the early part of the year 765 A.H. (October, 1363 A.D.) and the writing of the book ended, with the help of God, in the early morning of Tuesday, 21st Zul-Ḥijjah, in the year 766 A.H. (9th September, 1365) (*Sharḥ* Preface, fols 3b–4b, Pers. MS no. 1856, K.B.L.)

As is clear from this preface, this work, far from having originated from any desire to "make his mark", was yet another example of Sharafuddin's child-like willingness to be of help to others. On this occasion, Ashraf's delicate sense of fitness has led to our enrichment, for the commentary is, by any standards, a remarkable work.

The many collections of recorded discourses are replete with examples of services rendered to disciples. His letters are also filled with a touching concern for his many disciples. We shall glance at some of the expressions of his concern that are found therein. Very often we know nothing more about the recipients of these letters than what we read in the letters themselves. For this reason, further elucidation is generally not possible.

> Dear Brother Shamsuddin (i.e. Qazi Shamsuddin, administrator of Chausa)...you should study carefully the letters

that flow uninterruptedly from here and be assured that your letters have arrived. Quite often you say that my letters don't reach you, and you accuse me of being guilty of forgetfulness. This is not so. You should not entertain such thoughts! (*200* 26, p. 398)

You (Shamsuddin) have said: "Bashfulness prevents me from writing anything. If you send me something, then I shall be able to reply."

What is this bashfulness? Write whatever happens to you and what you are doing whenever you have the opportunity to do so. One of the obligations imposed on members of this group is that a disciple should not conceal anything he does from his spiritual guide, no matter how shameful it might be. If a patient does not explain his symptoms to his physician, how can he help him? Or if he gives him a false account of his symptoms, what will he be able to do? How will he get well again?

In short, a disciple should be as open with his spiritual guide as a patient is with his physician. (*200* 31, pp. 403-4)

Your letter (Qazi Zahid's) has arrived. I have read it carefully. Have the mind of a leader, be firm-hearted and manly, for God's grace and generosity are with you. Grace makes all difficulties seem easy, while His generosity bestows whatever is desired, for this work does not depend on causes. (*200* 37, p. 409)

Sharafuddin is most unwilling that others should in any way be put out on account of him, as the following indicates:

My brother in the Faith, Maulana Sadruddin...from your old friend, Ahmad Yahya Maneri...

Qazi Zainuddin has arrived and given me news of your good health and safety in great detail, right up till the last day. Nobody else had ever given such a clear and detailed account of whatever had happened there. God be praised!

He said: "The Maulana wants to come and visit you. It would not be surprising if he has set out and is already on his way."

> Coming and going involves much hardship. I have heard that your sons are small. Apart from you, there is no one to look after them. It would not be proper to leave them alone. It is against right order to abandon what is obligatory for the sake of something one is free to do or not. (*200* 43, pp. 418-9)

We must not imagine that Sharafuddin knew only how to write honeyed words. He had a mind of his own and, when needed, could express it quite forcefully, as this excerpt, to the very same addressee, shows:

> Dear Brother Maulana Sadruddin...before this, a letter along with a memento had been sent. I have not heard whether it reached you or not.
>
> In the meantime a dear friend of mine, a resident of Bihar, has arrived. He said to me: "Maulana Sadruddin is well. He has the post of Deputy Judge of Sonargaon!" (Niyābat-i Qazā).
>
> I rejoiced when I heard that you were well, but my heart was filled with disgust when I heard about your post!
>
> O Brother, you must be fifty or sixty years of age. What place is there for a judicial appointment and for lecturing and hearing students' lessons? Light a fire and burn the lot! Put your books and paper in the corner. Break your pen and tip your ink-pot upside down. Occupy yourself with grieving over your misdeeds and wondering whether you will be able to steer your faith through darkness to safety. (*200* 44, p. 419)

He makes the very same point in another letter:

> To the Chief Divine, (Śadr ul-'Ulamā), Maulana Hamiduddin, from Sharaf Maneri. It has come to my hearing that you have been invested with the office of judge and, notwithstanding your knowledge and peaceable disposition, you have put yourself in great danger.
>
> I ask myself this question: "How could such confusion have arisen in his intention of pursuing knowledge? Otherwise,

he could not have grown disappointed with the benefits and fruits of knowledge, nor could he be satisfied with reality without Reality:" It is well known that it has been said that it is ignorance to bow down to any knowledge which does not lead a person towards God. (*200* 58, pp. 442-3)

The recipient of the next letter was possibly Maulana Nizamuddin Maula, the Chishti, who had coaxed Sharafuddin into Bihar and who had attended so thoughtfully to his needs. Sharafuddin's tender gratitude is quite touching.

> My old Friend, Imam Nizamuddin, peace and blessings from poor, insignificant Ahmad Yahya Maneri, known as Sharaf!
>
> O brother, rest assured that your estimable letter, filled with subtle meanings and delicate hints, reached me, and I read it with great satisfaction. It brought to mind days gone by and our former association...
>
> O brother, who is there in this world who has not borne the pain of the departure of friends, or tasted the sherbet of separation from them?
>
> Now you have reached the twilight of your life. Be wise and realize that paradise, which is something created, cannot be found along with this world. Hence it is impossible to find the Lord, the Creator of paradise, together with the world...Hence it is that abandonment of the world is the fountainhead of worship. (*200* 85, p. 480).

One final quotation from his letters indicates how delighted he is to perform any little service he can for his disciples.

> My Dear Son, Qazi Husamuddin, may God grant you insight into the defects of your soul...
>
> Thus we have reached the stage where, on account of the good opinion you have of me, poor though I be, you are intent upon joining yourself to me and have besought me to send you a cap. I have acceded to your request and am

sending you, my son, the cap I received from my own spiritual guide!

You should, as a condition of this work, gather together some dervishes who are devoted to the mystical endeavour and, in their presence, first of all express sincere repentance for your sins. Then, renew your faith. That is when a manly spirit comes to birth.

When the disciple of such a righteous man places a cap upon his head and thinks to himself, "On account of this work, all other has stopped," he then tosses the world behind him and turns his face towards the Last Things...

Once again, be grateful and, day by day, add lustre to yourself by means of the deeds, actions and good behaviour to this order. Bind your high resolve to its members in order to attain to their stages and states and be blessed with a portion of their spiritual wealth. Both in this world and in the next remain under their protection.

Borrow a copy of my letters (i.e. *The Hundred Letters*) from somebody or other and have a copy made for yourself. Keep it always with you. Time and again you should go over the letters, making a careful and minute study of them. God willing, the principles and basic attitudes of this school, the practice of this order and the way of acting of this group will become known to you from this source, for a disciple can either listen to what his guide says or read what he has written. If the former is impossible, he will have to content himself with the latter. (*200* 91, pp. 487-8)

It takes no great effort of the imagination to appreciate how precious Najibuddin's own cap was to Sharafuddin, yet he graciously bestowed that very cap on an aspiring disciple, who must have been delighted at his good fortune. It is also interesting to notice that Sharafuddin himself refers to *The Hundred Letters* as the work which embodies the basic position of the Firdausi order, providing, as it were, its "spiritual constitution". He takes it for granted that a copy will be readily available. The teaching embodied in this work will be seen in the next part of the present study.

There can be no mistaking the quiet, self-assured tone of the letters quoted. In modern terminology, Sharafuddin is clearly a 'liberated' person, a man who knows what he wants to say and says it. In addition to providing instruction and encouragement to his various disciples he is also quick to let them know his mind when he thinks they have erred. No matter what he writes to his disciples we can discern therein a genuine concern for their welfare. This is his overriding preoccupation as he writes to them.

Just as the previous section provided us with an example of Sharafuddin's getting angry, so too this one enables us to catch a glimpse or two of his sense of humour. The following is recorded:

> Maulana Musharraf once asked the Sheikh (i.e. Sharafuddin) to express his view about those dervishes who break their fast before sunset or in the early afternoon. The Sheikh replied that he had already given an answer to this question —("When caught between two difficulties, they choose the easier.").
>
> Maulana Musharraf, however, came again to the assembly and put the same question: "Some of the dervishes break their fast in the early afternoon. On what authority do they do so, for obviously it was against the explicit injunction of the Law. It is incorrect."
>
> The Master, at that time, was in a humorous mood, and smilingly said: "Are you saying that a dervish was doing this at some other time, or at the moment? If it pertains to the former, then the reply is the same as I have already given. If it relates to the present time, you should go and enquire for yourself!"
>
> The master was about to conclude this matter, but Maulana Musharraf repeated his question, and he wanted to know what would happen if somebody wanted to act in that manner.
>
> On hearing these words of his, the Master again smiled and uttered these blessed words: "This is not something to be

thought about. This is work for one's heart and soul!" (*Baḥr*, p. 64)

Sharafuddin clearly thinks that the benefits of fasting, as prescribed by the Law, can only be understood by experience, not by discussion and arguments. Because he was in a humorous mood he was able to deal so patiently with his persistent questioner. We have another instance of his subtle humour.

Amir Sikander, his personal attendant, said: "When the minstrels began to use *chakri*, i.e. Hindavi, in the honoured assembly, you forbade them to continue. Why did you do that?"

He replied : "*Chakri* is found on the lips of women. It is a very free sort of thing. There were also some young men in the assembly. Can you tell me where one and all acquire the power to bear such things? Confusion would result, for "melodious songs are as enchanting as adultery." For that reason it was forbidden. If, however, it takes place in privacy, and all present are ascetics, men of struggle with self and having much knowledge, as well as being capable of making lawful exceptions, then they can do so."

The afore-mentioned Sikander said: "What if someone decides it is lawful for him?"

He replied, "Oh, so you have already done so? But how can all do so?"

Afterwards he smiled and said: "For the moment, at least love between husband and wife is left!" (*Baḥr* 14 Sha'ban, 759 A.H.) (Sunday, 22 July, 1358, p. 5)

We are able to relax in the company of a man who can joke like this! His humour also serves to indicate something of his great inner freedom, for a lesser man would be too worried about his 'image' to relax in such a manner. His very humanness made him all the more endearing to his disciples.

Dealings with Rulers

We have already seen that Sharafuddin, even as a young student in Sonargaon, had some contact with Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz Shah. In Rajgir, he was famous enough for the people to ply him with requests to write letters, on their behalf, to the local administrator. He did so, and even late in life he continued to do so, often in his own hand. For example, on 26 September, 1359, the following was recorded:

> Qazi Ahmad, memorizer of the Word of the Lord—may God increase his blessings—was present in the noble assembly. He asked for a letter of recommendation concerning the livelihood of Majdullah for the Governor. The Venerable Master responded by writing a letter several pages long in his own hand. (*Baḥr* 14 Sha'ban, 5th of 11th month, 759 A.H., p. 53)

It is difficult to imagine the Governor's refusing a request from Sharafuddin, unless the matter was misrepresented, and then he would have hastened to meet him in order to explain why he was unable to meet his request. We have already seen how generous and respectful Majd ul-Mulk was, and how grateful he had been when Sharafuddin acceded to his request to accept the royal grant from Muhammad bin Tughluq.

Sharafuddin's dealings with the ruling classes reached to the very top, as the following letters show:

> To Dawar Malik, son-in-law of Sultan Muhammad (Tughluq), in reply to a letter of his...from Sharaf Maneri, a mangy dog at the threshold of the scholars.
>
> Peace and blessings! I approach the threshold of your exalted office together with a thousand expressions of bashfulness and shame, as well as with thousands of excuses and signs of abjectness. Thus I, this black-faced dog, express my wonder that the Minister of Religious Endowments (Khidmat-i ṣadrī) should address me with so many expressions of humility
>
> All that I can say is to repeat the complaint made to musk that it had only one fault. It enquired what it was. It was

told: "You share your fragrance alike with people who are important as well as with nobodies "

It replied: "I don't pay attention to whom I am sharing myself with. I simply look at what I am." If this were not so, how could it have happened that you, an exalted minister, addressed me as "Chief Sheikh" and "Axis of the Saints" and claim to be a follower of mine?

Alas, alas! My works have not gone beyond those of people who are insolent, disloyal and accursed, no more than dust, with heads hung in shame, idolators and wearers of sacred threads, while the people, on account of the hypocrisy of a mindless one like myself, have formed a groundless opinion of me.

It is related that a certain eminent person recited the funeral prayers over someone. Afterwards he heard that the man had a very good reputation in the city. He said: "If I had known this before, I would not have recited his funeral prayers."

He was asked why he said this. He replied: "Unless a man becomes a hypocrite he won't acquire a good name among the people." And if it is merely a question of being widely known, why, Satan is far better known than I am!

O eminent leader, Islam is not the sort of religion that displays the beauty of its visage to every defiled and unwashed fellow! If anybody nowadays calls his customs and habits "Islam", he should realize that it is not so...(*200* 96, pp. 493-4)

We cannot but admire Sharafuddin's ingenuity in finding ways to side-step the praise lavished upon him—efforts which resulted in the very opposite result! It is also evident that Dawar Malik, no matter how highly placed he is, is not getting anything from Sharafuddin, in stark contrast to Husamuddin!

The addressee of the following letter was none other than Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq himself:

To Sultan Muhammad! Great and Most Glorious Brother, lover of the poor and indigent, Muhammad Shah—may God foster all your affairs, both in this world and in the

next! Greetings and prayers from the writer of these words, Sharaf Maneri.

Read and grasp the meaning of this saying of the Honoured One, for God says: "What you abhor involves something really beneficial for you; while those things you are fond of, contain much which is injurious to you."

This is illustrated by the companion, Salabah. People used to call him, "The Pigeon of the Mosque". One day, he came to the Prophet and began to lament his condition. The Prophet said: "Seek what you want from God the Exalted One! It may be conducive to your good." He did not do so, but repeated the entreaty in front of the Prophet. The Prophet prayed for him and his prayer was answered. Opportunities opened up for him. He got what he wanted. The world revealed its visage to him. He acquired camels, goats and other similar things, both to right and to left. His heart became engrossed in them. "The Pigeon of the Mosque" began to abandon congregational prayer. Things reached such a stage that he abandoned Islam. He became an apostate—may God pardon him!

Then again there was Qarun, who had been an Israelite. He was quite safe as long as his desires remained unfulfilled. When he got what he wanted, he abandoned Islam and became an apostate—may God pardon him!

There was also Pharaoh. As long as he was hungry and with unfulfilled desires, he made no claim to divinity. When he got what he wanted, he laid claim to divinity and said, "I am your Lord, the Most High God!"

Finally. there were Nimrod and Shaddad. They also claimed divinity only when all their desires were fulfilled. Many more similar examples could be cited.

From all this it is clear that it is much better for a man to seek his own well-being from God if he wants to better his own condition and still remain secure.

At your request, O Brother, the writer has sent the above-written lines. May God foster your affairs both in this world and in the next! God willing, signs of a favourable

response could manifest themselves in the near future and give you, my brother, reasons for being thankful, so that it might lead to an increase, and not result in harm but in your good end, by the grace of God!

The next point is that you, my brother, had desired that I should write something especially for you concerning the knowledge of the Sufis. Realize, my brother, that the knowledge of this group is extremely precious and exalted, and cannot be contained in letters and words.

What can be put in writing has been done so by this helpless one. It is said that it has been sent to you, my brother, and that two volumes have reached you.

As for what cannot be contained in words and sentences, why, who has written such things that I can do so too? The reply can only be,

> One who has not tasted, cannot understand. (*200* 207, Pers. MS No. 1394, K. B. L. fols 216b, 217a)

The sequence of events which led to the writing of this most extraordinary letter was as follows: In the late 1340's Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq was extremely hard-pressed, with rebellions on many fronts. In this state, a copy of *The Hundred Letters* and, so it would seem from the text, one of *Ma'dan ul Ma'ānī* also reached him some time after 1347 A.D. He was impressed by the letters and wrote to Sharafuddin, requesting his advice and prayers, and also a few words about Sufism written especially for him. The letter quoted is Sharafuddin's answer to this two-fold request, and has to be dated before the death of the Sultan in 1351 A.D. In answer to his first request, Sharafuddin bluntly tells him that his trials and difficulties are having a very good effect on him; they are preventing him from getting puffed up with pride! He does, however, pray for him. As to the second request, he tells the king that he has already provided, in the form of his *Letters*, what can be committed to writing on the subject. He concludes by asserting that this knowledge can only be obtained by experience.

Although Sharafuddin does pay his respects to the Sultan at the beginning of the letter, it is absolutely devoid of any

trace of obsequiousness, being thus yet another sign of its author's great inner freedom. One would have to search far and wide for a similar letter from one of "His Majesty's loyal servants". This "inner freedom" is further evidenced by the use, on half a dozen occasions, of the word "brother". One senses—as Muhammad Shah must also have—little warmth in the word, in sharp contrast to the spontaneous warmth one experiences whenever one comes across this word addressed to Qazi Shamsuddin in *The Hundred Letters*. Sharafuddin was certainly keeping his distance from the Delhi Sultan, and this is quite understandable in view of his known attitude towards him.

> We also have a letter to his successor, Sultan Firuz Shah.
>
> These pieces of advice have been copied from a letter which had been written to the Revered Sultan Firuz Shah, and which contained a petition on behalf of Khwaja Abid Zafarabadi, whose property had been destroyed by oppression. (Editorial comment)
>
> It is related that Bilal, the muezzin, said: "I was sitting down along with the Prophet in Abu Bakr's house in Mecca. Somebody came to the door. The Prophet told me to go and see who it was. I saw a Christian standing there. He asked me if Muhammad was inside. I said he was. He came inside at once and said:
>
> 'O Muhammad, you claim to be an apostle of God. You say that He has sent you. You invite one and all to embrace the Islamic faith. If you are in fact an apostle, you will not allow a strong man to oppress a weak one.'
>
> The Prophet said: 'Who has oppressed you?'
>
> 'Abu Jahl has snatched away some of my goods.'
>
> Immediately the Prophet got up. It was siesta time and very hot. He set out to assist the oppressed man. I said: "O Apostle of God, it is siesta time, and very hot. It is most likely that Abu Jahl is taking a siesta. He will get angry."

He did not, however, sit down, but kept on going in an angry mood. He rapped at the door of Abu Jahl's house, so much so that Abu Jahl got angry and swore by his goddesses, Lat and Uzza, that he would kill the man who was beating upon his door. When he came outside he saw the Apostle standing there.

He said: 'You have come here? Why didn't you send someone to me ?

The Prophet angrily retorted: 'Why have you seized the goods of this Christian? Give him back what belongs to him!

He replied: 'Is this what you have come for? Why didn't you send a friend through whom I could return them?

The Prophet replied: 'Don't make a lengthy speech, simply give him back what is his!' Abu Jahl brought out everything and handed it over to the Christian. The Prophet said: 'O Christian, now you have your goods back.'

'Yes,' he replied, 'except for one sewing-needle.'

The Prophet said: 'Give him back his needle!'

Abu Jahl replied: 'O Muhammad, you can go back, I'll return it.' The Prophet refused to go until the needle was returned. Abu Jahl went inside but couldn't find the needle, so he brought out a better one. He said: 'I couldn't find his needle so I've brought out this one in exchange. It's better than his was.' The Prophet asked the Christian if this were true. On being assured that it was, he said: "O Christian, if you had said it wasn't, I wouldn't have gone until I had extracted its price from him and handed it over to you." ...

God be praised that today we have such an exalted yet kind personage (i.e. Firuz Shah) who is the refuge of the oppressed and distressed. At his threshold, justice and equity have made their appearance in this world. (*200* 95, pp. 492-3)

It is difficult to imagine Sharafuddin writing such a story to Muhammad bin Tughluq! His rationalistic bent of mind would

have had much to feed on. Sharafuddin, however, knew his man. He knew that such a tradition would carry a lot of weight with Firuz Shah who was particularly keen to administer justice to "oppressed Muslims." We need have no doubt that the man's request received a favourable hearing. Sharafuddin is obviously more at ease with Firuz, and not so much on his guard.

Sharafuddin's dealings with the Sultans of Bengal seem to have been of an extremely friendly nature, as the following excerpt, from a long letter of Muzaffar to Sultan Ghiyasuddin of Bengal, indicates:

> I always found the Sheikh of Islam, Sharafuddin, showed a favour towards this land (Bengal). It was especially blessed by God in that He caused Sheikh Sharafuddin, who was God's vanguard, to stay there. Although Firuz Shah and others on his side made repeated requests to the Sheikh to write something especially for them which they might retain as a memento, he did not write or send anything separately to them. On the other hand, with a glad and willing heart he frequently wrote to, and was happy with, the Martyred Sultan. (Sikandar Shah, d. 1389 A.D.) (*Muzaffar* 163, pp. 502-3)

This shows that he was in correspondence with Sikandar Shah on a regular basis. Unfortunately, none of these letters have so far come to light. One can easily imagine the good effect his letters would have had on the Sultan. It is particularly interesting to note that he wrote 'with a glad and willing heart'. He seems to have retained a "soft spot" for Sultan Shamsuddin's successors. This affection presupposes a respect which is in striking contrast to the official imperial portrait, painted of these Sultans by chroniclers based in Delhi, which was never very flattering.

Reactions to Sharafuddin

We have a variety of reactions to Sharafuddin in our source material. It is clear that he made a profound impact on people.

Even as a young lad, he had impressed Abu Tau'ama so much that he decided to take him off to Sonargaon with him. It is clear that the Maulana, in addition to teaching Sharafuddin, had a deep affection for him.

In Delhi, at least initially, it was his intellectual qualities that aroused admiration, as was recorded of his visit to Nizamuddin Auliya. Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi must have grown very close to his gifted disciple, though his warm love was sometimes accompanied by needed remarks, as we have seen. Probably even in the jungle of Bihia people were drawn to care for him, as the tradition referred to indicates, and as the following tends to confirm:

> Once, during the month of Ramzan, he had been present in a village in order to perform the night prayer and the extra prostrations. He stayed on there. The chief man of the village took him along with him to break his fast at his place. In order to take care of him, he went along with him. Food was brought forward. They ate together. His men saw this and said: "Our master has no shame, for he eats together with the likes of this casteless fellow!"
>
> He said: "That night, I was very happy." (*Manāqib*, p. 142)

The chief man of village is evidently a Hindu, most probably belonging to the high, warrior caste of the Rajputs. He has no qualms about sharing a meal with a Muslim, but his servants are quite put out by their master's behaviour. We have to presume that there was a small mosque in the village, otherwise there was no point in Sharafuddin's going there for night prayers. Yet the village is predominantly Hindu, with a Hindu chief, evidently an enlightened man. This is not the only piece of evidence in our source material which indicates that, although provincial governors and other administrators were invariably Muslims, in the countryside many ordinary Muslim farmers and craftsmen actually lived under local Hindu rule.

In Rajgir the people would surely have met his meagre needs, both as a tribute to his holiness and, for many, as an

expression of gratitude for his assistance, either by his writing petitions on their behalf or having performed some other service for them. It was in Rajgir that Nizamuddin Maula and some of his Chishti companions were so inspired by him that they frequently went to visit him and discuss their problems, especially their spiritual difficulties, with him. Wishing to have easier access to him themselves, in addition to enabling others to benefit from his learning and saintliness, they built a small hut and then a proper dwelling-place for him in Bihar. Even the Sultan, Muhammud bin Tughluq, desirous that the people in general might profit more from his life and teaching, conferred a grant for the founding and maintenance of a hospice in Bihar. The governor, Majd ul-Mulk, respectfully asked Sharafuddin to accept the grant, at least for his sake. When he tried to turn the newly-constructed hospice over to a visiting dervish who happened to be present for the inaugural celebrations, the visitor pointedly replied:

> Master, nobody recognizes you through your hospice or prayer-carpet. Whoever recognizes you does so through God's grace. We have all come here by virtue of your inner power and as your uninvited guests. By virtue of your blessing, Islam will become widely known and thrive here. (*Ma'dan* 61, p.471)

The deep sense of respect for the Venerable Master comes out especially in the various prefaces we have studied. One can, as it were, feel the texture of this respect in the writings that have come down to us. One very vivid illustration of a certain sense of awe was contained in the reaction to Sharafuddin's anger. Let us also look at some reactions found in the correspondence in our possession.

In some of his own letters, Sharafuddin refers to the signs of respect that have been showered upon him from all quarters (cf. his letter to Dawar Malik). As well as indicating the general reaction to him, the following letter contains a detailed account of his own reaction to that praise.

> To Sheikh Maghribi (addressee unknown)—the mercy of God be upon him—(i.e. he must have died before the actual

compilation)—from Sharaf Maneri, who is ashamed of his failings and confounded by his faults. As long as he is alive, he will grieve and lament over them. Peace and blessings, and may an abundance of yearning for God be yours!

Malik Husamuddin Kara arrived and conveyed your greetings, brother...

When Malik Husamuddin set out on his return journey, I sent a letter for you along with him. God willing, you must have received it by now. You are living in Bistala, an out-of-the-way place. Not everybody passes by that way, you know, nor is everyone able to reach you. That is the reason for not sending you letters and mementos. If it were not so, I would have been constantly sending them to you so that, for the few days that remain to me, you might keep me in mind and pray that I might keep on labouring resolutely until God Almighty delivers me from this bondage.

What should I do? My feet are bound together. The Law doesn't let go of me, otherwise, in no time at all, I would come to the door of the mosque where you are staying and act as its attendant, lamenting over the past. How much I wanted to leave Hindustan and enjoy the company of Muslims and engage myself in serving the dervishes! In this way, perhaps, I might become a Muslim—but He didn't release my captive feet!

God knows what will eventually happen to me. Even till today the thread of infidelity has not been cut from my neck, nor have I beheld the beauty of the divine unity. I have passed my life in idol-worship in the midst of an infidel people. No matter where I look, my gaze meets nothing except idols, sacred threads, infidelity and accommodation to the carnal soul. Alas! Alas! Alas!

Another reason for astonishment is that one addresses me as "Sheikh"! another becomes my disciple; someone else writes "O Lord of the Sheikhs"! yet another calls me, "The Axis of the Saints" and yet, up till now, I haven't even seen the face of a Muslim, nor have I cut from my neck the

thread of attachment to my soul. See how ignominious I am! ...

O brother, it is beyond the scope of words and writing to describe the condition of this insignificant speck of dust. This couplet sums it all up well:

I don't know what I am: I lead a captive life:
I'm not a Hindu, nor a Muslim, renegade or evil-doer.

What is there now left for me to do except fly to my friends, fall at the door of those who love me and cry out in front of them, imploring them to bestow upon me an alms from their treasure of blessings?

Friends and dear ones have always come to the help of a friend who is in trouble...

Although he is firmly rooted in the sins and offences he has committed, a penitent doesn't look at them but rather at the kindness and strength of his friends, for a helpless one is capable of nothing but oppression and offences, whereas from one close to God and enriched by Him, loyalty and reverence can be expected.

Look at your own mercy, not at my sins!
I am filled with sins, from head to toe nail!
(*200* 94, pp. 491-2)

It is difficult not to be moved by the profundity of Sharaf-uddin's genuine humility—a virtue so often used as a camouflage for personal deficiencies. His humility is grounded in a living, intimate, all-consuming union with God Almighty, in comparison with whom he can truthfully refer to himself as "this insignificant speck of dust". Nevertheless, even at this stage, there is no question of "sitting back and taking it easy". No, he explicitly asks for prayers "that I might keep on labouring resolutely until God Almighty delivers me from this bondage." Speck of dust though he be, and utterly dependent upon God for deliverance, yet he has his own task to perform—that of labouring resolutely to fulfil the multifarious demands made on him from so many quarters.

His attitude towards his friends is poignant in its simplicity, and contains a piece of invaluable information, for he openly refers to their love for him. This is precious for, although we can gather much information about the respect, admiration and awe in which Sharafuddin was held, and even though we can read all the signs of love in so many reactions that have come to us still, this explicit reference to it, by Sharafuddin himself, deserves our attention. Apart from the inscrutable secret of God's intimate dealings with him, the realization that he was loved was the supreme consolation coming to him in human form! The passage also reveals clearly why he was unable to go as a pilgrim to Mecca, no matter how much he might have wanted to.

Muzaffar refers to his spiritual guide frequently in his correspondence. He acknowledges a letter from him:

> Sometimes I place it on my eyes, sometimes on my head. You had written: "I felt sorry at the loss of something." This applies much more to me. For twenty years and a few more I have proceeded along this 'Way', but could not set my steps on the correct path. You had said, "Be a Muslim!" I taxed my brain for many years about this Islam, but could not grasp it. (*Muzaffar* 21, pp. 113-4)

He writes to a friend:

> I have heard that you (Maulana Farid) have built a house of privacy in which you remain engaged in prayer. This was a pleasing piece of news, showing that the discipleship of the Great Sheikh (i.e. Sharafuddin) has produced its results. (*Muzaffar* 24, p. 118)

This rather startling expression occurs in another letter:

> I swear by the soul (jān) of Sheikh Sharafuddin that anyone who takes a step outside the circle has travelled one step towards a vagabond existence. (*Muzaffar* 74, p. 280)

Sharafuddin's soul must, by implication, be alive and operative, otherwise the oath has no meaning. The 'circle' refers to the Law.

Muzaffar's deep sense of gratitude to his spiritual guide wells up in this letter:

> I pray for the long life of the Master. Qazi Zainuddin has come and delivered the thirty silver pieces brought as a gift from the Master to this receiver of gifts.
>
> Gifts from the Master are a common feature but this old beggar receives special attention for some reason, for he remembers this poor man with prayer for correct faith and, whenever it is possible, he writes a line or two with his own pen, thus conferring honour upon me. Sometimes I became presumptuous with my guide, but he connived at it. (*Muzaffar* 139, pp. 422-3)

A mirror is a small thing, but the mirror of the Venerable Master of the World is a priceless memento in Muzaffar's eyes, something fit to be sent to a king, Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah of Bengal (1389-1409):

> I, this poor one, used to be in attendance upon the Sheikh, my spiritual guide—may his secrets be sanctified—and would be standing by when the barber handed over the mirror to the Sheikh. He would look at his face in it.
>
> After the death of the Sheikh that excellent and beloved mirror, which was cherished by the heart of this helpless one, disappeared. Recently, after many years, it has been brought to me by a certain person. I considered it a great blessing and an inestimable gift.
>
> This is the mirror I am sending to you as a present, O Sultan! (*Muzaffar* 151, p. 452)

Muzaffar's nephew, Husain, also spent some time with Sharafuddin and refers to both him and Muzaffar as "my Sheikh". One has often to find out from the context exactly which Sheikh he is referring to.

> Whoever has collyrium in his eyes today from my spiritual guide, Sharafuddin, cannot be devoid of the divine insight which is a consequence of the perfection of the faith. (*Husain* 40, fol. 15a)

It is more likely that the following words refer to Sharafuddin than to Muzaffar:

> When I think of what I have seen during many years I conclude that, if I had been a stone, I would have melted. After some time, however, due to the blessings of my Sheikh, I received a taste for Reality.
>
> This affair is not as easy as it seems. You have to wait for many years in order to acquire something. (*Husain* 84, fol. 165b)
>
> Because of the knowledge I possess of the Sheikh, I feel so much at peace in my mind that for all eternity I shall not be separated from him—God willing! (*Husain* 114, fol. 199b)

The fact that he is referring to Sharafuddin is borne out by the following rather extraordinary statements, referring explicitly to him.

> My Brother Sirajuddin, I want to tell you that I woke up last night at midnight and the greatness of the Sheikh impressed itself powerfully upon my mind...
>
> I saw that the station of the Sheikh was such that he, my beloved one, was enthroned as a lover, while the royal edict of the Beloved of all lovers was that the Revered Sheikh was to be given a station right there.
>
> What more can be said? A thousand Bayazids, Junaids and Mansurs would get lost and turn to nothing in this station, wouldn't they? Praise be to God, both you and I have entered the train of servants and dogs of that Revered One. We have been accepted at this threshold! (*Husain* 127, fols. 209b and 210a)

It would be a mistake to dismiss out of hand these statements of Husain as exaggeration, for he was an extremely gifted man who had benefited spiritually and intellectually from his association with both Sharafuddin and Muzaffar, as well as from his travels to Arabia and the important centres of Islamic learning there. He was a remarkably well-read man who was

equipped with a penetrating mind. His words form a fitting, if unexpected, conclusion to the reactions of people to Sharafuddin!

Attitude to the Law

We have already seen, in "The Great Lime Scare in Sonargaon," how Sharafuddin's sympathies lay with the expounders of the Law who refused to condemn the use of lime obtained from burnt sea shells for use in betel leaves. His comment confirms this:

> They wanted to make things easy for the people, for the Path of Islam is a wide-open one. It is not lawful to pass a law which would be a burden for the people. (*Khwān* 6, p. 14)

In the same assembly, the following very revealing exposition occurs:

> A man in Bihar was saying that he had issued a legal decision which affirmed that the wearing of silk ribbons in the hair was forbidden.
>
> The Venerable Master commented: "That is childish behaviour! What credence should be accorded to the speech of such people? They should confine themselves to attempting to understand, for once, what a particular tradition means. Credence should be given only to the speech of a man of genuine faith, one who is trustworthy and fit to be emulated. What such a person says can be accepted, but how can one believe what anyone at all says?
>
> It has reached the stage where those who have read the *Hidāyat* and *Pazhdavī* consider themselves expounders of the Law and have commenced issuing legal decisions. If, however, they are asked some question about the fundamentals of religion or of mystical knowledge, they are nonplussed! What credence can such people be given? What understanding do they possess? And where is their religion? Maulana Sharafuddin Tau'ama was so learned that he had

become a renowned scholar throughout all Hindustan and nobody had any doubt about his knowledge. He wore silk ribbons in his hair. He also wore a pyjama-cord of silk! He has written in such a way as would be difficult to emulate afterwards. If some difficulty cropped up during a lesson, he would pause to reflect. While thus absorbed he would begin to finger the hair which fell to his shoulders. He would be thus preoccupied until the difficulty was solved. He would then let go his hair and explain the nature of the difficulty."

Afterwards he added : "Those who are renowned for their faith and have become acquainted with the full meaning of Almighty God's Book and the Traditions of the Prophet are capable of giving legal decisions, for they can immediately classify any particular tradition and know where it is applicable.

Nowadays, if the expounders of the Law are asked about a particular tradition they are at a loss to reply. The crux of the matter is simply this: They should have both Quranic exegesis and the Traditions at their finger-tips. On this basis they will be able to issue commands, for they will be drawn from the Quran and Traditions!"

Later he added: "The science of Tradition is a difficult one. It comprises all the parts of The Book (i.e. Quran). Until a person has mastered them all he is unable to expound correctly the meaning of a single tradition. On the other hand, whoever comprehends the contents of The Book will be able to explain any tradition. If a tradition is brought before him he will compare it with The Book. If it is in consonance with what he finds there, he will accept it: if not, he will reject it. What could a person ignorant of the meaning of The Book use as a basis for comparison?" (*Khwān* 6, pp. 15-16)

Sharafuddin obviously has little time for half-baked scholarship where the Law is concerned. His attitude could be summed up as, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." It is interest-

ing to notice that he demands much more than a knowledge of common works on the Law such as *Hidāyat* and *Pazhdavī* (commonly referred to as *Bazdawī*). No barefoot expounders of the Law for him!

This whole exposition shows his insistence on certain qualifications required for a person to become an authoritative expounder of the Law, able to interpret correctly the meaning of any tradition. He has to be very well versed in both the Quran and the Traditions. He also has to be a man of genuine faith, a trustworthy person fit to be emulated. Finally, each tradition has to be tested against the final authority—the Quran! This implies a real mastery over the entire Quran. These qualifications form an interesting and very demanding trio, particularly the crucial role accorded to a deep knowledge of the Quran.

There are references to some of these books. For example, he quotes a tradition from the collection made by Bukhari known as *al-Jami'al-Saḥīḥ*, and states that it is not from the books of the remembrancers. (*100* 58, p. 236) This distinction itself required considerable depth of scholarship. Muzaffar Shams Balkhi tells us that Maulana Zainuddin of Dewa had sent Sharafuddin an excellent copy of Muslim's *Saḥīḥ*. (*Muzaffar* 138) Sharafuddin tells Muzaffar that he has read and enjoyed his commentary on the *Mashāriq ul-Anwār*. (*28* 12) This presupposes a knowledge of the work itself. It was the most commonly studied work of traditions in India during the Sultanate period, coming from the pen of the noted Traditionist, as-Saghani.

Sharafuddin's keen interest in Quranic exegesis is indicated by the following excerpt:

> Once I had brought a copy of *Tafsīr-i Kabīr* ("The Great Commentary", by Fakhruddin Razi, who died in 1209 A.D., and whose work covers many volumes), from Qazi Minhajuddin in order to study it. I began with the first volume. Now what remains for me to study? Every point and variety of argument have been adduced. Every possible query is already answered, in all its manifold aspects. I said: "So

many arguments are quite beyond a man like me!" I studied the work for a while, then sent it back.

On the other hand, this work of exegesis by Imam Zahid has turned out to be an astonishing one. Whatever might prove beneficial for religion has been included in this work of that eminent scholar. He has not omitted anything, nor included anything superfluous which would induce boredom...

Qazi Badruddin of Arwal (in Gaya district, Bihar) had come here one day. He said that whenever Maulana Shamsuddin Yahya came across a difficult verse during his lecture, this was the commentary he would have recourse to, even though he had many Arabic commentaries with him. In spite of that, he would order his servant to bring the commentary of Imam Zahid, the second or third volume, whichever he happened to need, and scrutinize it.

Each time I wondered about this, thinking about all those Arabic commentaries which he had passed over. "Why does the Maulana choose the commentary of Imam Zahid which is in Persian?"

One day, I found an opportunity to enquire about the point. "Master, you have so many Arabic commentaries, nevertheless you always return to this Persian one. What is the reason for doing so?"

Maulana Shamsuddin gave this reply: "The reason is simply that the Arabic commentaries contain very eloquent language and an unending flow of words, as well as innumerable meanings. On the other hand, I have not found any other commentary to equal this Persian one for enjoyment and sweetness." (*Khwān* 39, pp. 97-8)

Sharafudddin's opinion, the fruit of considerable powers of discernment, coincides with that of Maulana Shamsuddin. The excerpt gives us a glimpse not only into Sharafuddin's interest in Quranic exegesis, but also how avidly it was pursued in other places, such as Arwal. It may be a surprise for some to discover the wide range of commentaries available, and the discerning minds of these scholars of mediaeval Bihar!

Both Quranic exegesis and the study of Traditions have been dealt with—somewhat briefly, to be sure—in this section, for they are intimately linked, in Sharafuddin's mind, with the Law. All his studies had but one ultimate aim: to help both himself and his fellow men along the road leading to eternal bliss. For himself, this meant an assiduous study of both disciplines mentioned above in order to find out more perfectly, and thus be able to imitate more faithfully, the practice as well as the preaching of the Prophet. For the people, it was in order to enable him "to make things easy for them", but never at the expense of the genuine teaching of the Law. From his examples of harsh decisions foolishly given, and the high demands he makes of those who would presume to interpret even a single tradition authoritatively, it is clear that he had a deep concern for the lot of the common man. Indeed, his attitude is the very antithesis of what is commonly dubbed as '*Pharisaical*'.

Attitude to Listening to Songs

Probably no issue more sharply divided Sufis and orthodox scholars in fourteenth-century India than that of the legality of assembling to listen to the singing of verses, often employing the very terms and imagery of profane love songs. We could well begin our investigation into Sharafuddin's attitude to this practice, often discussed by him in his writings and discourses, by referring to an exposition found in the discourses of Husain Mu'izz Balkhi.

> The topic of listening to songs arose. A companion asked him (Husain): "How did the Revered Sheikh (Sharafuddin)—may God preserve his secrets—conduct musical assemblies? Was there first a Quanic recital and would the session commence after that?"
>
> He—may God preserve him—replied: "Yes, there was a Quranic reciter with a good voice present. He would begin by singing ten verses of the Quran, during which many tears would roll down the cheeks of the Revered Sheikh. After that, a singer would take up a couplet or a ghazal.

When he saw that the Revered Sheikh was overcome by ecstasy, he would set that particular couplet to music. When he came to his senses, he would exclaim, 'God forgive me! God forgive me!' Sometimes he renewed his ablutions.

The Revered Sheikh did not have a predeliction for participating in musical sessions. If a singer made the suggestion to have one and somebody else agreed, he would bring the singers and listen. Sometimes, however, he would say: 'Friends, you go along and listen!'

In the '*Awārif* it is mentioned that, if both at the beginning and the end of a session, the Quran is recited, then we can be confident that no one will be taken to task for what is witnessed therein. Such sessions, however, are forbidden for anybody who is still in the clutches of his carnal soul. Those, however, of a refined nature and subdued senses, who experience some compulsion, can certainly hold them as lawful. All and sundry, however, cannot presume they are lawful for them.

There was an assembly in the house of Samandar. The Venerable Master summoned Sheikh Muzaffar. Some of the Sheikh's companions, such as Sheikh Zahid, Sheikh Ruknuddin, Qazi Alam and some others, were listening to songs. When it was over, the Revered Sheikh turned his blessed gaze towards the companions and said: 'I am giving you a message in the language of song. It will convey something to you.' He then recited this quatrain:

A group of self-indulgent people listens to singing:
I intend to say a word or two in the language of song.
Let them trample underfoot whatever is foreign to song!
The songs are your own, and you are in their grip.

'What is all this wild activity and throwing of clothes in a bundle? What are you doing, stamping your feet?' The companions acknowledged the justice of his words. They kept quiet. The Venerable Sheikh was not pleased with their behaviour during the musical session." (*Yakhfā* 40, fols 61 a, b).

The question presupposes that Husain had often been in attendance upon Sheikh Sharafuddin, and that this was common knowledge. Hence the general nature of the question, Husain informs us that the Quranic reciters had a particular way of singing the Quran. It was very simple and could be compared to plain chant. It could be very moving, as Sharafuddin's tears indicate. There was once an incident in Sonargaon concerning the effect of one such recital, rendered by Maulana Zainuddin, upon Maulana Taqiuddin Mahsavi. It was so great that he became transported and flung off his outer garment, turban and shoes. (*Ma'dan* 6, p. 44). The verses chosen were sung in a simple tune, but when the Master fell into an ecstasy, the singer would take up the particular couplet that had affected him and display his musical virtuosity by singing it to some novel tune. This seems to be the meaning of the Persian, for Sharafuddin was rather strict in what he permitted during his musical sessions. He allowed the clapping of hands in order to keep in time, but there is no evidence so far discovered which would indicate that he allowed any musical instruments to be played. The particular session described in the second part of the excerpt shows clearly that he disapproved of dancing and the flinging off of one's turban and so on. Husain tells us unambiguously that such behaviour was most definitely not approved. There is no evidence to show that Sharafuddin himself ever danced during such sessions.

The second half of his quatrain is somewhat enigmatical. What is clear is that it contains a reproach. Apparently the essence of his reproach was the conviction that the dancing was not really inspired, it did not result from a genuine and uncontrollable divine seizure. Sharafuddin himself makes explicit reference to this in his letter on the topic. (*100* 93, p. 388)

> Some good people, who dance with a swaying motion, do so without having been overcome by the ecstacy of union, they simply move aròund in imitation of the dervishes.

His personal opinion is that it is not good to make a habit of dancing. (*100* 93, p. 389). He certainly approved of listening to songs, as the same letter indicates:

> Whoever is overcome in face of the love of the Lord, and who yearns to see Him, finds that listening to songs is a stimulant which excites his holy desire, and serves to further strengthen his love and ardent yearning, by bringing it out into the open. (382)

That is at the beginning of the letter. At the end he says :

> When, inspired by a good disposition and heart, men rejoice in such a way that there is no belittling of the Law, then this is something laudable.

Intimately connected with his approval of the practice in itself, however, is his desire to present Islam as attractively as possible to the people of Bihar. At the popular level, singing formed the very core and marrow of their gathering together to sing the praises of their particular deity. To attempt to impose a blanket ban on such a form of communal worship would be very foolish in Sharafuddin's eyes. His own explicit words are these, and they follow immediately after the ones just quoted:

> It would be an ill-conceived move to interfere in the traditional ways in which a people are accustomed to doing things. The injunction of the law is, "Deal with people according to their particular behaviour and disposition," for people will be happy with what agrees with their behaviour, but will be scared away by anything which goes against it. (*100* 93, p. 393)

It has to be remembered that all these remarks are culled from a letter which deals explicitly with the topic of listening to songs. This means that they have to be most concisely understood in the present context. Hence it has to be asserted that Sharafuddin was very much interested in not scaring people away from Islam, but in attracting them to it. While there is no evidence whatsoever to show that he tried to 'convert' anybody to Islam, there can be no doubt that his heart yearned that many might see the light and embrace 'the true faith'. This is perfectly clear from his reaction to the conversion of an eighty-one year old Hindu who:

> entered the assembly. He told the Venerable Master that he wanted to become a Muslim. The Venerable Master instructed him about the formula of the divine unity. He proclaimed it and became a Muslim, God be praised . . .
>
> After saying this, the Master repeated these words to himself several times, "Praise be to God! Praise be to God! For so many years he was a stranger, but now has become a companion. He was an enemy, and has become a friend. The infidelity of so many years has been erased by the recital of a single sentence!" (*Ma'dan* I, pp. 8-9)

From being an 'enemy' of God he has become His 'friend' and this 'conversion' calls for joyous celebration. Hence, although he did not go in search of converts, and could never be called a proselytizer, Sharafuddin joyfully welcomed anyone who freely asked to become a Muslim, and was careful to make such a transition as easy as possible by taking full cognizance of traditional forms of worship.

Husain had mentioned that "the Revered Sheikh did not have a predeliction for participating in musical sessions." This is a later development, as is clear from the words quoted from letter 93, written some years before Husain appeared on the scene. The reason for the change seems quite clear. Sharafuddin's inner life had flourished to such a degree that he no longer needed the 'stimulant' of listening to songs in order to find union with God. It seems that he was embarrassed by his ecstasies in public and that is why he exclaimed, "God forgive me! God forgive me!" for one and all to hear, because he did not want to provide the people with yet more evidence of his great sanctity. In a sense, he repented of having revealed in public the 'secret' of the flood of divine activity that utterly swept him off his feet.

When in his senses, however, he kept a sharp eye on what was happening, and did not hesitate either to stop the session or to make some critical observations later on, as in the present excerpt. We have already seen that he once stopped the singing because of the possible effect of some Hindavi ver-

ses on a few young men who were present in the assembly. Here is another example:

> After the noonday prayer, he (i.e. Sharafuddin) ordered the assembly to take place above the store-room. The revenue officer, Mahmud Awaz, was present in the assembly. Ten minstrels had come along with him. They began to sing. Later on, they switched to singing in Hindavi. After the recital, the Venerable Master said:
>
> Hindavi compositions are very forthright and frank in expression. In purely Persian verses, there is a judicious blend of allusion and what can be fittingly expressed, whereas Hindavi employs very frank expressions. There is no limit to what it explicitly reveals. It is very disturbing. It is extremely difficult for young men to bear such things. Without any delay, they would be upset. This is why there are difficulties involved in allowing young men to listen to such things. The members of this group, however, experience only one grief and pain. They consider all such things to be somewhat ridiculous." (*Mukhkh* 53, p. 154)

This is a most interesting discussion about the relative merits of Hindavi and Persian verse for use during musical assemblies. Although Sharafuddin clearly perfers allusive Persian, his remarks about Hindavi verse are an unintended tribute to its telling vigour of expression! It is also clear that, although Persian was the formal language employed at the Master's assemblies, the ordinary spoken language of the people—Sharafuddin included—was Hindavi. This applied to all, Hindu or Muslim, otherwise the 'disturbing' effect on the young men—presumably Muslims—simply could not have occurred.

Much, indeed, could be said about the significance of the appreciative attitude of Sharafuddin towards Hindavi. The whole issue involved was that of upgrading the mother tongue to the level of a literary language. It is taken for granted nowadays that a person's mother tongue should be the language of written as well as oral expression. This was not so, however, in the fourteenth century. In the Western half of the Muslim

world, Arabic went unquestioned as the sole literary language. In the East, it was Persian, with Arabic restricted to theological themes. Among the Hindus of the whole of North India, Sanskrit went unchallenged. In Europe, Latin reigned supreme. Interestingly enough, it was during Sharafuddin's own period of literary output that Europe produced its first vernacular composition, in English, *The Cloud of Unknowing*.[5]

Sharafuddin wished to share his knowledge—if not his 'secret'—with others, and had no scruple at all in using Hindavi insofar as it was either necessary or useful. All personal interviews with poorer Muslims and with Hindus—at the very least—would have been conducted in Hindavi. Many Hindavi words begin to appear in our Persian source material, and some verses and phrases are quoted, mainly by Muzaffar Shams Balkhi.

Hence, although Sharafuddin neither wrote in Hindavi, nor did he actively encourage others to do so, his approval nevertheless helped create the needed atmosphere where a man like Mulla Daud, in Sharafuddin's own declining years, could be inspired to commit to writing, in the form of a long poem, a beautiful love story of the Ahir tribe. He wrote his *Chandain* in 781 A.H. (1379), in Persian script, in the Hindavi of his area, known as "Awadhi".[6]

Finally, it has to be remembered that there was no particular language in the fourteenth century called "Hindavi". Wherever this term appears in Persian sources it applies to the local language, as opposed to Persian. The "Hindavi" of Bihar township was the form of Magahi current at that time.

Attitude to Ecstatic Utterances

It has to be stated immediately that, by their very nature, ecstatic utterances tend to be somewhat enigmatic. Sometimes

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5. E. Underhill, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (London, 1970), pp. 5-6.
6. S.H. Askari, *Mulla Da'ud's Chandain and Sadhan's Maina Sat. PUJ* vol. XV, 1960, pp. 62-63. Prof. Askari has many articles dealing with "Hindavi" in various issues of PUJ ahd JBRS in particular.

such utterances are incomprehensible gibberish. No problems arise from outpourings of this nature, for nobody understands what has been said. What is meant here are utterances of the type of the classic "I am Reality" of al-Hallaj, or "Praise be to me" of Bistami. These two examples occur frequently in Sharaf-uddin's writings, with particular emphasis being placed on the former, for al-Hallaj had to pay the supreme price for his utterances. Let us examine some of these instances.

> In the experience of divine union, as expressed in the "I am Reality" of al-Hallaj, or the "Praise be to me" of Bistami, it is possible to become proud of being blissfully united to one's Goal. (*100* 5, p. 27)

> Time and again it happened that the zealous one of Iraq, al-Hallaj, being consumed by the fire of separation, would say, "O that I were dust and had nothing to do with these affairs!" At other times he would say, "Where are the angels of the firmament and those who inhabit the heavenly court, that they might line up in front of the throne of my wealth?" (*100* 17, p. 73)

> Scholars of the Law condemn Mansur al-Hallaj as a heretic. The scholars of the Path—the Sheikhs—are of two minds. Some neither condemn him nor accept him—they have left him to God—while others have a good opinion of him. (*Mukhkh* 98, p. 100)

> The States and works of Mansur al-Hallaj were all of an extraordinary nature. (*Mukhkh* 35, p. 100)

These quotations introduce us to the consideration of whether the authorities were justified or not in meting out the death penalty to him for his utterances. The topic came up for discussion.

> Maulana Nizamuddin said: "Khwaja Junaid was reproached on the grounds that he was acquainted with the spiritual state of Khwaja Mansur Hallaj yet, in spite of this, he gave a decision in favour of his execution. He should not have

issued such a verdict. He should have investigated the matter for himself."[7]

The Venerable Master said: "A number of the mystics say that is better to kill anycne who speaks openly of the manifestation of divine unity rather than allow him to go on living. Moreover, verdicts are handed down with regard to the external forum, not the internal. Here, the question is in the external forum, not the internal...if the Muslims arrive at a consensus concerning some order and someone stands apart from this general agreement, Satan is with him." (*Ma'dan* 4, pp. 35-6)

While Sharafuddin's high regard for the personal sanctity of Mansur al-Hallaj cannot be doubted, he sides with Junaid's alleged opinion and countenances his execution, affirming that he should have kept the "divine secret" to himself.

With this general background, let us examine the incident involving Ahmad Bihari and Izz Kakavi.

Ahmad Bihari was a man with a touch of madness. He frequently visited the Revered Sheikh, Sharafuddin Maneri. He used to ask him about the finer points of divine unity. Sometimes he himself had something to say. He enjoyed being with the Sheikh. When in a state of ecstasy, he used to make extravagant statements which were quite beyond the understanding of the ordinary people.

Sheikh Izz Kakavi was a man devoted to asceticism. He had also attained a spiritual state of great perfection. On account of the degree of his absorption in spiritual matters he did not find it easy to take the long road to the town of Bihar from the township of Kako so as to be with the Revered Sheikh, Sharafuddin Maneri. If he had any difficulty concerning the finer points of divine unity, passionate and affectionate love, he would seek a solution from Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri through correspondence. The Sheikh

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7. This charge has no historical basis, as Junaid died in 910 A.D., while al-Hallaj was executed in 922 A.D.

used to reply to his letters. Among the writings of the Sheikh, these are known as the *Answers to Kakavi.*

Well now, these two eminent men went to Delhi during the reign of Sultan Firuz Shah. They openly made outrageous statements about divine unity. The religious scholars of Delhi said to Sultan Firuz: "Both these men say things which render them liable to death."

The Sultan convoked a tribunal. He called all the great men of the city together. They all agreed to the execution of both those eminent men, and indeed, had them killed.

In a city like Delhi, with so many sheikhs, religious scholars, learned men and a king like Sultan Firuz, devoted to the dervishes, there was no one to at least suggest that, on the pretext of their being mad, they could be released.

When the news that they had been killed reached Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri, he said: "It would be strange if a city where the blood of such great men is shed were to remain inhabited!" And that is exactly what happened. After not such a very long interval, even during the life-time of Sultan Firuz, the first signs of decay appeared...Afterwards, the Mughals came and destroyed Delhi. (*Manāqib*, pp. 129-30). [The last point refers to Timur's invasion in 1398.]

We notice that no attempt is made to defend the utterances of these men. The author criticizes the way the Sultan dealt with them. Sharafuddin's alleged prediction, coupled with Timur's invasion, was undoubtedly genuine, in his eyes. We notice that the first part of the account is sober and factual, and agrees with what is found in Firuz Shah's own reminiscences, except that he says he imprisoned them.

There was a sect which wore the garments of atheism and, having thrown off all restraint, led men astray. The name of their chief was Ahmad Bihari. He dwelt in the city, and a party of his followers called him a God. They brought these people before me in bonds and chains, and informed me that he presumptuously made himself a prophet, and said

that there could be none of the grace of prophecy in anyone who had not been admitted into his following. One of his disciples affirmed that a god had appeared in Delhi, i.e. Ahmad Bihari. When these facts were proved against them, I ordered them both to be confined and punished with chains. I admonished the others to repent, and I banished them to different cities to put a stop to the influence of this wretched sect.[8]

There is no reason for thinking that Firuz Shah wished to softpedal the severity of his punishment for, in the previous paragraph, he had described the punishment meted out to other heretics: "I cut off the heads of the elders of this sect and imprisoned and banished the rest."[9] At any rate, both Ahmad Bihari and Izz Kakavi perished.

When we turn to second part of the narrative, however, we notice that it is largely the author's own interpretation of the significance of the event in the light of the alleged prediction made by Sharafuddin. We may be excused for not sharing this interpretation, and also for calling into question the authenticity of the prediction. Such predictions recur monotonously in, for example, early Chishti sources, and Nizamuddin Auliya has one attributed to him, an ominous "Delhi is still far off," rightly referred to by Professor Saksena as "a later fabrication which lacks contemporary confirmation."[10] The incident under consideration is further referred to by our author and we should hear him out.

> (The story of Ahmad Bihari and Izz Kakavi is repeated. The Master is speaking). "It would be extraordinary if such a city were to remain inhabited!"
>
> The gist of this conversation came to the ears of the Sultan. He called the theologians and notables together and said: "I killed them on the basis of your judgement. Why does Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri speak the way he does?"

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8. Elliot & Dowson, *The History of India* (London, 1871), p. 380.
9. Elliot & Dowson, *The History of India*, vol. III, p. 380.
10. Habib & Nizami, *The Delhi Sultanat*, p. 481.

They replied unanimously: "O Sultan, summon him here. Then we shall be able to clarify his meaning." Accordingly, the Sultan prepared an order summoning him to Delhi. In the meantime, the attendant of the Chief of the Sayyids, Sayyid Jalal Bukhari, came to the Sultan, bearing his master's blessings for him. The Sultan said: "How long a time it is that the Venerable Master has not remembered me!"

The attendant replied: "The Letters of Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri had reached the Master. He went into retirement in order to study them carefully. For some time nobody was able to meet him. Many days passed in this fashion."

The Sultan regretted having sent his summons. He sent a second order saying that, if his first one had reached Bihar, it should not be acted upon. It is not good to disturb such an eminent person.

When news of the summons reached the Master of the World, he said: "Thanks to the Revered Sayyid Jalaluddin, it has been retracted." After this, the second order came. (*Manāqib*, pp. 137-8)

In this narrative, Firuz Shah is reported to have said, "I killed them," which contradicts his memoirs; it is also most strange that a copy of Sharafuddin's *Letters* took so long to reach such an eminent Sufi as Jalal Bukhari; and again, at the end, miraculous knowledge is attributed to Sharafuddin, and the whole story hinges on a prediction which is hard to accept. In view of the way Sharafuddin has aligned himself with Junaid in his attitude to ecstatic utterances in public, it is extremely difficult to see how he could have made such a prediction in the first place, for it presupposes a criticism which, as the evidence plainly shows, he was not inclined to make. He had affirmed that al-Hallaj should have kept his secret to himself. The final comment in the above excerpt is also completely out of tune with Sharafuddin's well-known, earnest desire to keep hidden his own 'secret', whereas such a statement is specifically designed to make public his miraculous powers.

Sharafuddin brings up the topic in one of the letters sent under seal to Muzaffar. It is much more likely that this is his

reaction to the Ahmad Bihari and Izz Kakavi affairs, for the account read more like a topical comment than the expression of an eternal verity, and it would make eminent sense after the deaths, however they may have been wrought, of those who had had the temerity to utter the 'secret' in public presuming, of course, that there was a 'secret' in the first place!

> Uttering "I am" in the state of ecstasy
> Is not a fault in such a condition.
> It happens when one is overwhelmed
> And one's soul witnesses naught but God.
>
> When the traveller reaches this verse, "Everything is perishable except God Almighty," and when this becomes manifest, then the second part, "One without partner" displays itself to him. Tell me, what else can come except "I am"?
>
> When, however, the head of the administration, growing jealous, has settled upon death on the gallows, saying "It is better to kill the revealer of the secret of divine unity so that others may live," what will he do, for he does not seal his lips?[11]
>
> If an intoxicated one reveals the secret of His love,
> The Law's retribution is—the gallows! (*28* 15, p. 316)

Even in private correspondence, Sharafuddin's position is consistent, and serves as a warning to Muzaffar to watch himself when in public. This evidence clearly mitigates against his having said anything like the criticism implied in the above prediction, and this view is further strengthened by these remarks of Husain Mu'izz Balkhi:

> Maulana Qamaruddin said: In the sayings of Maulana Ahmad Bihari this is found: I have asked many people about the meaning of this tradition: 'With me there comes a time when there is no room either for an angel near God nor a prophet.' Nobody gave me a satisfactory answer

11. This seems to be the sense of the Persian, but it is not clear in any of the MSS so far seen.

until I met a man of God. I listened to him for a long time. He said : 'When the Prophet was sitting in privacy with Aisha, he said: 'With me there comes a time . . .' "

He (Husain) said: "Maulana Ahmad Bihari was a madman. These are the words of a madman." (*Yakhfā* 49, fol. 81b)

There is no sign of sympathy for a man who had been 'unjustly' executed. His attitude is a somewhat sharpened version of Sharafuddin's own. He is clearly extremely critical of Ahmad's explanation of the tradition. It is difficult to imagine Husain's rejecting Ahmad in such uncompromising terms if his Revered Master, Sheikh Sharafuddin, really had made the alleged criticism and prediction!

Attitude to Nizamuddin Auliya

Because of the great fame and prestige of Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya, it is instructive for us to examine material which throws new light on him and enables us to discover the attitude of his contemporary, Sharafuddin Maneri, towards him. The following is recorded by Zain Badr Arabi.

The Master's (i.e. Sharafuddin's) son—may God Most High grant him a long life and knowledge—was going through the *Sirāj ul-'Ārifīn*, (A Lamp for Mystics). He came to these words: "Once a well-born gentleman, who had travelled to Syria and Turkey, arrived at Sheikh Nizamuddin's place. At that very moment somebody arrived and placed his head upon the ground in prostration.

The traveller said: 'Prostration is meant only for the Lord.' He began to dilate upon the point. Afterwards the Sheikh said: "It could be considered allowable because it was formerly a form of salutation observed by the people towards the king. Our forefathers also used it as a form of greeting. This might explain how it has come down to us." (*Ma'dan* 12, p. 113)

The work mentioned was *Sirāj ul-'Ārifīn*, a collection of discourses of Nizamuddin Auliya still current in the early fifteenth century, for it is also quoted by Sharafuddin's biographer (*Manāqib*, p. 127). No extant copy of this work is known of today.

Frequently we come across Sharafuddin saying, "I have seen in the *Discourses* (mālfūz) of Sheikh Nizamuddin..." (e.g. *Ma'dan* 19 & 20, pp. 168, 186 & 179). One of these is the work already referred to, *Sirāj ul-'Ārifīn* (A Lamp for Mystics), and it is explicitly stated that "it is related in the eighth chapter of *Sirāj ul-'Ārifīn*, a collection of the discourses of Sheikh Nizamuddin, that. . . (*Manāqib*, p. 127) Amir Hasan's collection, *Fawā'id ul-Fu'ād* is also referred to (*Ma'dan* 20, p. 186). Normally, however, the collection is not named.

The next excerpt is quite revealing:

> One of those present in the assembly referred to the *'Awārif*. The Venerable Master said: "Although the *'Awārif* is a trustworthy book, by means of which one can investigate Sufism, the commands pertaining to the Way and the religious practice of this group, nevertheless its author was a great man who could have written both better and more extensively than he actually did. Moreover, he descended to the level of disciples and beginners. According to their capacity there is an abundance of knowledge and deep meanings, for which it has become quite famous.
>
> Sheikh Nizamuddin, for example, has mentioned in his book of *Discourses* that the Glorious, Most High God had bestowed upon the Sheikh of Sheikhs [i.e. Abu Hafs Suhrawardi, author of the *'Awārif*] every blessing and spiritual wealth that was possible for a man, except for a taste for musical gatherings. This was the one thing that was lacking in him.
>
> As for the letters of 'Ain ul-Quzat, well, that is quite another matter! (*Ma'dan* 20, p. 183)

It is most unusual to find a Medieval Indian Sufi writing in this strain about the *'Awārif ul-Ma'ārif* and its author, Abu Hafs Suhrawardi, for the work formed "the guidebook of almost all the Indo-Muslim mystics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries."[12] Sharafuddin made use of the work in his own hospice as one of the manuals for instruction, yet he has his reservations about its usefulness for those who have made some progress, as his words clearly indicate. His stand runs diametrically opposite to that of his fellow Indian Sufis, a number of whom, such as Gesu Darāz, wrote commentaries on it. Although Sharafuddin wrote a very detailed commentary on another famous handbook, *Ādāb ul-Murīdīn*, (*Rules for Sufi Novices*), written by Abu Najib Suhrawardi, he significantly wrote nothing on the former work! By mentioning Nizamuddin's praise, in contrast to his own reservations, there is an implied criticism of his opinion. This does not, however, imply the slightest doubt about Nizamuddin Auliya's holiness. On one occasion,

> a description of the virtues of Sheikh Nizamuddin then occurred. The Venerable Master said: "There is no doubt about the greatness of Sheikh Nizamuddin. He was a very holy man." (buzurg būde and *Ma'dan* 20, p. 186)

The following account not only throws further light on Sharafuddin's opinion of Nizamuddin Auliya, but also on his own critical approach to the collections of discourses (malfūz) he had read. Unfortunately, he does not name the collection he is referring to. He relates:

> "I read in the *Discourses* of Sheikh Nizamuddin that he had said: 'I find one thing quite difficult to discover, namely, whether the vision of God occurs before entry into paradise. In other words, does it occur in the grave or not? That evening, I saw Maulana Weis in a dream. I asked him if the vision of God was granted after death but before entering paradise, or not. He started questioning me,

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12. A. Schimmel. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, 1975, p. 348).

asking me 'when' and 'for whom'. I wasn't satisfied by that dream. Next time I saw my adopted sister, Gulchin, whom I also questioned. She replied, 'Yes, it does occur, and I have acquired it once or twice.'

Afterwards the Sheikh exclaimed, 'Praise be to God! Weis hasn't seen God, but Gulchin has!' "

The Venerable Master said: "Sheikh Nizamuddin's position was above that of having recourse to dreams in order to seek answers to his intellectual difficulties. That would be to put one's conscious, waking state on the same level as that of dreaming, whereas the former is superior to the latter. This is according to the divine pleasure." (*Ma'dan* 51, pp. 404-5)

Sharafuddin simply does not believe this story, and he gives his reasons for not doing so. They are very cogent, and serve to illustrate something so obvious that it is often overlooked—the fact that Sharafuddin used his discretion in accepting what he found in the various books he read. Like all great teachers he used stories and anecdotes to illustrate his teaching. If a number of them referred to God's great power as displayed in miraculous events, then these were utilized in order to encourage people, as Zain Badr Arabi tells us in the preface to *The Hundred Letters* : "The Revered Master put to writing. . . as well as stories of our predecessors, which could serve both to verify and render palatable this teaching."

The following excerpt tells us much about Nizamuddin Auliya's balanced attitude towards ascetical practices. It so happened that

Khwaja Zahiruddin began to relate how Maulana Wahiduddin used to spend the last ten days of the year in solitude. He said: "When I went and became a disciple of Sheikh Nizamuddin, I consulted him about my austerities. I also said that I spent last ten days of the month of Ramzan in solitude.

The Sheikh said to me: 'Maulana, none of my close companions observes such a practice.' Again he said that

he had grown accustomed to it and it had become easy for him.

The Sheikh said: 'Then let it be!'

After this he enquired why solitude was not practised, seeing that it was enjoyed by Tradition. The reply of the Sheikh was capable of being interpreted as a lack of consent."

The Venerable Master said: "It is quite possible that the Revered Sheikh had discerned some danger or temptation hidden in the practice, and that is why he issued no injunction about the matter." (*Khwān* 29, p. 77)

Sufi practices differ, as the above excerpt shows, and the danger of absolutizing any of them has to be avoided. Sharafuddin admits that there can be very good reasons for not following this particular practice, even though it is dear to him. Sharafuddin's calm, respectful tone should be noted. There is no trace of his trying to belittle, in any way, a sincere man who thinks differently from him about a particular Sufi practice.

Sharafuddin himself tells us about the time when

Sheikh Nizamuddin Badauni [i.e. Nizamuddin Auliya]—mercy be upon him—had recently arrived in Ghiyaspur and settled down there. Up till then, he had not become really famous, but every day his spiritual wealth and blessings were on the increase.

Sheikh Ruknuddin (elder brother, by a different mother, of Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi) used to invite Sheikh Nizamuddin during the feast-day celebrations, for he too used to participate in them. The mother of my spiritual guide [i.e. Sheikh Najibuddin] had been a remarkable woman. She had so many good qualities that she was called a Sheikh! One day, she said to Sheikh Ruknuddin: "What sort of a man is that Sheikh Nizamuddin Badauni who has settled down in Ghiyaspur and how can I manage to catch a glimpse of him?"

Sheikh Ruknuddin replied: "I shall invite him for a feast-day celebration and will arrange a special place for him.

When he comes, I shall indicate where you should sit. Sit down there and I will join the assembly and point him out to you."

He did so. She was taken to the place mentioned and seated there as arranged, while he himself entered the assembly in which Sheikh Nizamuddin was also present. He pointed him out with his finger. She looked at him and afterwards returned to her own apartment.

After this Sheikh Ruknuddin said to her: "Well, you have seen Sheikh Nizamuddin. How did he strike you?"

She replied: "I saw a light on his forehead that indicated he would do things in Delhi which nobody else had ever done." (*Khwān* 40, pp. 103-4)

This Ruknuddin was Ruknuddin Firdausi, son of Sheikh 'Imaduddin Firdausi who had married again, probably after the death of Ruknuddin's mother. This second marriage was with the daughter of Amir Khurd. She became the mother of Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi. Moreover, it was this Ruknuddin "who used to celebrate the feast-days ('urs) of the saints. Indeed, it was he who introduced this type of celebration in Delhi." (*Khwān* 40, p. 103) As Nizamuddin Auliya probably moved to Ghiyaspur around 1287[13], the incident must have taken place shortly afterwards, within a matter of months—if the phrase referring to his recent arrival (nau rasīda būdand) be taken seriously!

It is important to notice that Sharafuddin accredits Sheikh Ruknuddin Firdausi with the honour of introducing the feast-day celebrations of the saints ('urs) into Delhi. This practice is an extremely important feature of popular devotion to the great Sufi saints of India. The source of Sharafuddin's information must have been his own spiritual guide, Najibuddin Firdausi, Ruknuddin's younger brother and spiritual successor as head of the nascent Firdausi Order.

Sharafuddin has the following reminiscence. He relates that Sayyid Alauddin Jyuri and Sheikh Nizamuddin Badauni (i.e.

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13. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, pp. 158-59.

Nizamuddin Auliya)—mercy upon him—were co-students under Sayyid Sharafuddin, who was an eminent Sayyid. They studied the *Mashāriq* under him. I heard this from the lips of Khwaja Nizamuddin, who said to me:

'Once I had arrived at the city of Lakhnauti (Capital of Bengal). It so happened that I had to travel from there to Delhi. Maulana Badruddin gave me a gold ring, saying, "Deliver this to Sayyid Alauddin Jyuri as a memento from me." Likewise, three or four other people gave something for the same purpose. I also included something from myself.

When I arrived in Delhi, I went to his house. It was siesta time. I went to his dwelling and sat down. A servant came up to me and asked me where I had come from. 'I have come from Bihar,' I replied, 'but don't tell the Revered Sayyid that I have arrived, for it is an inappropriate hour.'

(Sayyid Alauddin found out he had come and called him in.)

After this I begged pardon for having interrupted him and placed before him each of the items that had been entrusted to me. The first was the gold ring. 'This is from Maulana Badruddin,' I said, and I explained who had sent each item. Finally, I took out my own gift and said, 'And this is from this helpless one...'

He enquired if I was anybody's disciple. I replied, 'Yes, I am.' He asked me whose disciple I was. I told him, 'Sheikh Nizamuddin Badauni's. The Sayyid said, 'This explains the matter! This has come to you from him!'

After this he said: 'Listen to this story about him. Both your Sheikh and I were studying the *Mashāriq ul-Anwār* under Sayyid Sharafuddin. Every time Sheikh Nizamuddin Badauni approached Sayyid Sharafuddin he would bring something for him. He would never come before him empty handed. Even if he came to him five times daily he would undoubtedly bring him something.

One day, the Venerable Sayyid reflected that so many students used to come each day to study with him yet nobody

else showed the good grace and enlightenment that this man did. Every time he came he never failed to bring something or other. This gave him much joy. Immediately he called down blessings upon Sheikh Nizamuddin Badauni, some of which have now been bestowed upon you." (*Khwān* 40, pp. 104-6)

This excerpt, for one thing, contradicts the common opinion, based on the *Siyar ul-Auliyā*, that Nizamuddin had studied the *Mashāriq ul-Anwār* under Maulana Kamaluddin Zahid from whom he was awarded a certificate of competence in 1280 A.D.[14] The discrepancy calls for elucidation. The present text, based on a named disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya, reported by an unimpeachable authority, in circumstances devoid of all controversy, dates from 1350 A.D., which means that it predates the *Siyar ul-Auliyā*, which was composed between 1351 and 1388 A.D. by Amir Khurd.[15] Once again, Nizamuddin Auliya's lovable character is brought out in a personal reminiscence from one of his fellow-students, Sayyid Alauddin Jyuri, who was the teacher of Sharafuddin's own guide, Nijibuddin Firdausi. (*Khwān* 40, p. 103)

One final reference to Nizamuddin Auliya is taken from the sixth chapter of *Sirāj ul-'Ārifīn*, a work studied in the Sufi centre at Bihar Sharif.

Sheikh Nizamuddin said: " 'Ain ul-Quzat was the son of a Qazi of Hamadan. What can be said in favour of the abundance of his knowledge? Granted he had some knowledge still, how could he become a dervish by the age of twenty? In his letters, the product of his mystical states, are found many subtle points. 'Ain ul-Quzat was a mystic but, because he was still young, he had not attained the stage of 'passing away', (fanā). He has praised himself in his own books. In addition, here and there, one finds words which exceed the limits imposed by the Law." (Sukhn az ḥad-i shar' bīrūn) (*Manāqib*, pp. 127-8)

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14. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. I, p. 159.
15. K.A. Nizami, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar*, (Delhi, 1973) p. 6.

In the light of these words, Sharafuddin's laudatory remark about 'Ain ul-Quzat's letters must be taken with added seriousness. Both he and Nizamuddin Auliya agree that he was a mystic, but the latter had certain reservations about some of his opinions.

Sharafuddin's attitude towards Nizamuddin Auliya is obviously one of great respect for the holiness and humanity of the great saint. There was something very gracious, lovable and attractive about him. This did not, however, mean that he agreed with everything he said. His opinion about the '*Awārif* and the letters of 'Ain ul-Quzat differed, to some extent at least, from Nizamuddin's. Nevertheless, he was quick to dismiss as a fabrication the story of Nizamuddin's having had recourse to dreams in order to solve his intellectual difficulties, insisting that he was above any such need. The whole discussion is helpful in indicating the need for a nuanced approach to the study of the great Sufis—often lost sight of in standard collections of their lives. Such works, of their very nature, tend to produce standardized versions of Sufis. Any authoritative work on an eminent Sufi has to be based on original source materials where there is sufficient scope for presenting a nuanced exposition of the Sufi being studied.

Attitude to Hindus

Much has already been related with reference to this topic, but it is worthwhile collecting our material in order to attempt to bring this particular attitude into sharper focus. One example of Sharafuddin's unstinted admiration for the supreme expression of love, through self-immolation, which he himself witnessed while in Rajgir, has already been narrated.

Another example has been recorded as follows:

> Again, on the same topic (love), Sharafuddin related another story: "In this elevated spot, the Hindus construct idol-temples and, round about them, they build cells. Women who are lovers of an idol, and whose husbands have died, begin to live in one of the cells that face the idol. They abandon everything out of their love for that idol, so much

so that if they are overcome by their love for idol, they cry out, 'Brahma! Shankar!' They go and excavate the hill at the level of the idol, and go themselves to this level stretch of land and stand there. They plant thorny bushes around the hill so that no one can bring bread or water to them. They themselves, according to a practice established by men, remain standing with their hands joined together. Some manage to remain like that for ten days, some for twelve, and a few even last for forty days, by which time they have become shrivelled up and die.

Afterwards, the people cremate them on that very spot. The Hindus distribute their ashes among themselves considering them as a blessing, saying, 'She was a lover!'

Some others are so overcome by their love for an idol that they wrap themselves in cloth soaked in naphtha oil, from the crown of their heads to the tip of their toes. They then say: 'Now set me alight!'

This is done, and they burn to death. In the meantime, the people are all agog, watching to see whether even a hair on her body moves. If not a single hair moves, they say, 'She was a holy person.' On the other hand, if they, perceive some movement, they say, 'She wasn't a holy person.' "

When he reached this point, the Venerable Master exclaimed, "Praise be to God! Praise be to God! A Hindu, out of love for a common piece of stone, kills herself in this fashion." (*Ma'dan* 32, pp. 274-5)

Sharafuddin's praise is all the more astonishing in view of the fact that, as an orthodox Muslim, he could never condone the expression itself—suicide! This discerning attitude of his is in consonance with his whole spiritual outlook, for it is centered on the heart of man as the "place", par excellence where God 'works'. In other words, God can clearly and manifestly be at work there, while a person's thinking and, in consequence, his actions, can be 'incorrect' which, for Sharafuddin, meant that they were at variance with the clear dictates of the Law. In this instance, the Law unambiguously forbids suicide.

It may be objected that this is pushing his appreciative statements too far, yet he expressed his astonishment more than once, and his expressions of astonishment, if closely examined—in *The Hundred Letters*, for example—are invariably linked to a realization of the marvellous activity of God deep within the heart of man.

Before developing our argument at a deeper level, it is worth mentioning that Sharafuddin, like everybody else, depended on Hindus for various aspects of daily living. We are told, by Husain Mu'izz, that

> The Venerable Sheikh used to act in the following fashion. There was a grain-merchant. When he had taken a loan of a thousand silver-pieces, and had accepted all sorts of freely offered gifts which were brought to him, he would utilize them to repay the loan. He used to say to his companions: "Whenever you go to the bazaar to buy or sell anything, first take the goods on loan and give the money later on so that it might really be a loan." (*Yakhfā* 36, fol. 52b)

Husain Mu'izz was discussing ways of ensuring that one ate only what was lawful when this example came to mind. The grain-merchant would have been a Hindu who was on friendly terms with the Venerable Master, otherwise he would not have allowed him to take such heavy loans.

There is further evidence of an attitude of mind that went far deeper than friendly social intercourse. For example, once

> Sheikh Mu'izzuddin was reading the *Ta'arruf*. The topic under discussion was asceticism. These words were reached "A holy man was asked what asceticism was. He replied: 'When a man has no fear of the influence of the world, whether he be a believer or an infidel.' "

> At this moment the Venerable Master—may God grant the Muslims the favour of his long life—said: "Yes, when a person has no connection with worldly things, then let him make good use of whatever exists. Whether he be a believer or an infidel, for him it is one and the same. (*Ma'dan* 26, p. 227)

Sharafuddin asserts that genuine asceticism will result in great liberty of soul as a result of its being freed from all created constraints. What is of supreme interest for us at the moment is the assertion that this liberty can be acquired either by a believer (i.e. a Muslim) or an infidel (i.e. Hindu). The same topic occurs elsewhere.

The Venerable Master said: "As far as the soul is concerned, the asceticism of a believer or of an infidel is one and the same, for it is mentioned in many places that monks, through practising asceticism, gain great lustre." (*Ma'dan* 23, p. 203) And again:

> Righteousness will guide you in your quest for friendship,
> Whether you be wearing a turban or a thread.

After this, he said: ' Results depend upon righteousness," (ṣadq). There is a story written somewhere that a holy man was once asked how it was that, when one of the infidel ascetics or devotees is burned, this must be present as a necessary condition. Also, other infidels consider their ashes as a blessed relic. They take them away to be used in time of sickness and infirmity and find them very helpful.

> The holy man said: 'This is the effect of righteousness. Even if the work they do is vain, nevertheless they are righteous. Wherever this sort of good effect is seen in some vain work, it can be realized what boundless effects righteousness in God's religion must have!" (*Mukhkh* 18, p. 37)

The image of the sacred-thread indicates clearly that Sharafuddin has Hindu ascetics in mind. He himself makes the distinction, already made, between a person who is righteous and his works which may not be so. His righteousness pertains to his heart, even though his thinking and actions may not be 'correct' for Sharafuddin. It is worth mentioning again that this attitude has profound theological implications and is very 'modern' in tone. It also indicates one of the fruits obtained by Sharafuddin's own association with some Hindu ascetics, for it resulted in his own conviction of the genuineness of their righteousness and love. Without this personal experience, it is not possible to imagine how he could have said what he has on

the topic. Even if one were to spend many a long year perusing works penned in places like Mecca or Cairo, it is difficult to imagine any such acknowledgement of the profound love and indisputable righteousness of "infidel, idol-worshipping Hindus' ever coming to light. Here, as in many other places, Sharafuddin has something very important to say.

Luckily, we have a story which helps illustrate this very teaching. It is related by the author of the *Manāqib*.

> I have heard that there was a very handsome yogi who came and met a number of the disciples of the Master of the World, Sheikh Sharafuddin. They were quite struck by his God-given beauty. That yogi had acquired inner qualities. He perceived what they were thinking, and said: "Such thoughts are not becoming! Do you have a guru? (The yogis call their guides 'gurus' in their own tongue.)
>
> Some of the afore-mentioned disciples said, "Yes, we have a guru." They related something about the Master of the World and his virtues. He asked them to bring him to him. They replied: 'He is a great man. He does not go to anybody. Everyone comes to him."
>
> He said: "Take me to him." They did so. At the very moment that the yogi's eyes fell upon the Master, he ran outside. He was asked why he was running away. He replied: "He has become like the Creator! I mean, he has been adorned with divine attributes. I don't have the strength to approach him. I shall be consumed if I do so."
>
> The story of his condition was brought before the Master. He smiled and said: "Tell him to come in now. He will find that he will be given the strength." When he returned and saw him, he said: "Now I feel at ease." He sat in the assembly. He remained sitting there for a long time.
>
> Afterwards, he said: "Instruct me in Islam." The Master instructed him in Islam. He kept him with him for three days, after which he sent him away. He became a wanderer. Someone said to the Master: "Why did you send him away after keeping him only such a short time with you?" He replied: "He had already completed the work. There remain-

> ed only the rust of the veil of infidelity. After Islam, by means of such a brief association, had removed that rust, I sent him away." (*Manāqib*, pp. 138-9)

The story gives us a beautiful illustration of a righteous Hindu, possessed of both inner virtues and striking external beauty. Three days with the Master was all that was required for his training, removing a little 'rust', for the 'work' of asceticism and struggle with self "had already been done." We can contrast this period of training with the longer one meted out to Muzaffar, for example, and the three years prescribed for Sufi novices.

The anecdote gives us "in the flesh" the attitude we have been engaged in studying. Some might doubt its authenticity, but the fact that Hindavi words, such as *guru* and *Kartar* (Creator), occur in the yogi's speech, add to its credibility, as does the fact that nowhere is it explicitly said that the yogi became a Muslim—we are left to infer that from the context itself. A fabricated conversion story could never be so constructed as to leave room for legitimate doubt about whether a conversion to Islam actually occurred or not, nor would it accord such a high spiritual status to a Hindu. It can also be mentioned that, in addition to the story of the conversion of an eighty-year-old Hindu to Islam, this is the only other conversion story so far encountered in the primary source material. There is no evidence of any attempt whatsoever to gain converts to Islam—though the two actually mentioned are given a very warm welcome by Sharafuddin!

Sharafuddin's attitude to Hindus was, of course, influenced by his attitude towards their religion. We have material which helps us understand what this attitude was. We are informed that

> Qazi Ashrafuddin said: " Once I heard from the Master's blessed lips that yogis say, 'If you wish to live, learn how to die.' "
>
> The Venerable Master replied: "Yes, yogis do speak like this, but they do not realize what they are saying. If you were to ask them what they meant, they would not know

how to answer you. On the other hand, anyone who founds a religion has experienced this matter within his own soul, and speaks from personal experience. Changes, however, are introduced by foolish imitators, just as 'Ain ul-Quzat has said: 'In my opinion, all religions—or most of them, at least—have, in a similar way, a genuine origin, but are not understood by foolish imitators who do not grasp what the founder intended to say. They have changed the original meaning.'

Just as this age is not without its foolish as well as its wise men, it can be understood that when someone expounds some doctrine and makes it the basis of a religion, that age also would not be bereft of both wise and foolish men. The founding of a religion or the acceptance of one is no light matter. The wise people of a particular period would not accept the proferred teaching of anyone if it had no foundation. This change has occurred at the hands of foolish people who did not understand what they heard." (*Mukhkh* 42, pp. 11-20)

Sharafuddin aligns himself with 'Ain ul-Quzat and expresses his profound admiration for the founders of religions, asserting that they were men who had had a profound personal experience of God, and they founded their religion on the basis of this experience. (Sharafuddin may have had the Buddha in mind, especially in view of his Rajgir associations). Many followers, however, cling willy-nilly to the doctrine without having had any experience of its basis. Because they do not really grasp what the founder intended to say, they either make unnecessary changes, or fail to make necessary ones.

Much could be said about this view but, suffice it to say here, that it enables Sharafuddin, at one and the same time, to appreciate the deep religious spirit of Hindus, while remaining critical of some of their doctrines and practices. He speaks explicitly on this topic in *The Hundred Letters*.

The infidelity of the investigators of truth means those who have seen their parents doing and saying things but are not content with what they have acquired from them. They

make an effort and even suffer in their search for proofs, passing their lives in the acquisition of the body of knowledge concerning their infidel doctrine by studying books and by means of austerities and self-struggle, are totally lost in their search for that knowledge. They make great efforts to purify their souls for the sake of reflecting on reasons and arguments so that they might investigate intricate points and thus deny the Creator. Or, they might find defects in confirming the existence of the Creator. They say: "The Creator is not supreme." They also say: "He is not a knower of particulars."

There are many other infidel sayings similar to these which all the groups subscribe to. Satan has been enhanced in their hearts and opinions! They make claims, saying: "Whoever is not endowed with this knowledge, and is not of this faith, is defective in knowledge and mystic perception." They go to such an extent as to say that the prophets were philosophers and whatever they said was the result of their own wisdom. They also bring forward many other invalid opinions and suspicions and are immersed in the acquisition of this temptingly provocative yet destructive knowledge. They call it the "knowledge of the principles of religion" so that nobody might become acquainted with the impurity of their faith. Those devoid of insight, out of mere imitation, accept those expressions of infidelity and completely pass beyond the pale of Islam. Many such calamities occur. May God protect us from such things! (*100* 68, p. 283)

Here there is a swing away from an appreciation of individual Hindus to a consideration of the doctrines they hold. The evidence here and elsewhere does not permit us to affirm that Sharafuddin had more knowledge than could be acquired by a man like him through conversation. If he had wanted to read the books in question, he would have had to study Sanskrit. There is no evidence that he did so. Indeed, in view of the very words quoted here, as well as from his general outlook, it seems most unlikely that he would even have dreamt of doing anything like a comparative study of Hindu and Islamic doc-

trines! He was clearly aware of the impressively high intellectual contents of the books referred to, and that some Muslims did succumb to the "temptingly provocative yet destructive knowledge" contained therein, and had even abandoned Islam. The statement that "many such calamities occur" is of historical interest, for the Persian chroniclers would have us believe that conversions were all one-way affairs during the Sultanate period. It is interesting to notice that, even while expressing his horror of such doctrines, Sharafuddin cannot but praise the assiduity and single-mindedness, with which 'infidel' scholars not merely studied their books but also purified their souls in order to be able to reflect all the more deeply on what they read.

There is an unusual case study of a Muslim who was attracted to Hinduism as a result of witnessing what he considered to be a miracle. Sharafuddin relates that

> A traveller came to me once. He had travelled mostly in hilly regions. He related this story: "I arrived in a hilly area. Many imposing idol-temples had been constructed on the hill, as well as fine cells. Some infidel worshippers and ascetics were living there. They were quite close to the city.
>
> I arrived in that city. That particular year, there was a drought there. I sat down in the bazaar. I saw that the king of that city, together with all the people, had come out of the city. They were carrying many gifts and presents along with them. I said to someone, 'Where are the king and so many people going?' I was told: 'There is a drought. This is why they are going out to the hill where the devout members of their religion live, in order to seek their intercession for rain.'
>
> When I saw this, I said: 'I will also go and see what happens.' So I went along. After a while, when the king was approaching the hill, the temple and cells came into view. He alighted from his horse and continued on foot, with great signs of respect and decorum, until he arrived in front of the idol-temple. There he stood still. He did not dare proceed without the permission of the devotees in order

to enter and offer his gifts. He placed them all in front, just where he himself was standing in the sun.

The devotees were all seventy or ninety years old and all were sitting in front of idols. Suddenly, one of them made a sign from within to the king for him to indicate what he wanted. The king also gave a sign with his hand, pointing towards the sky, indicating that he wanted some rain.

Afterwards they began to look at one another. After a while an old man got up as a spokesman, so to say, for the rest and came out into the courtyard of the temple. He stood in the sun and raised his eyes towards the heavens and began to pray in his own fashion. I found out from one Hindu that he was saying this: 'I shall not go out of this sun until You send rain.'

After a long interval, a cloud finally appeared and it began to rain."

When the Venerable Master arrived at this point, he said: "What did you make of it all at the time?" He replied: "I saw that it began to rain in answer to his prayer."

I perceived that he was completely dead inwardly and that he was close to apostatizing and acknowledging their religion. After hearing his answer, I said : "Be careful, don't put faith in such things, for it would be vain." Afterwards, I gave him two or three possible explanations of things similar to what he had narrated. He became composed at heart and bore testimony to his belief in God and in His Prophet .. (*Ma'dan* 54, pp. 429-30)

This picture of Sharafuddin, struggling to prevent a Muslim from apostatizing and embracing Hinduism, is something quite unexpected. It confirms the previous statement that conversions were taking place. Both instances can be said to depict genuine conversions, the former due to the attraction of the intellectual content of Hindu doctrine, while the latter was due to the attraction of the spiritual powers of some Hindu ascetics. It is instructive to notice that the operative word in both categories is 'attraction'.

There can be no doubt that Sharafuddin was himself influenced by the practices of the Hindu ascetics. In addition to the evidence already adduced we may ask what Muslim divine from Mecca would agree with the answer recorded here: "Qazi Ashrafuddin asked how many times the Prophet had prayed upside down. The Revered Master replied, 'Once." (*Khwān* 3, p.7) Or, again,

> The Master's son (i.e. Zakiuddin)—may God increase his knowledge—was going through *Sirāj ul-'Ārifīn*. He came to the following words: "A man was standing upside down, with the crown of his head on the ground and his feet in the air, reciting the Quran."
>
> The Venerable Master said: "This is called *kāchak*, while the jogis call it *kiyārī*." Afterwards, he added : "This can't be done all of a sudden. Only very slowly and gradually does it become easy. One begins by forming the habit of reciting one verse, then two, then three, slowly increasing the number of verses recited until one can recite many at a time." (*Ma'dan* 12, p. 113)

Sharafuddin's words arouse the suspicion that he may have tried this himself in his days of solitude. There is no known reference, however, to his doing so in Bihar. Other examples of yogic practices could be quoted but the point needs no further illustration. It should be recalled that in the field of doctrine no such accommodation has been noticed—nor, so it seems, is ever likely to be—for Sharafuddin adhered staunchly to orthodox Islamic doctrine.

Apart from letters eight and nine, which are addressed to a senior disciple, Qazi Sadruddin, who happened to be in Chausa for a while, Sharafuddin Maneri's *Hundred Letters* were all addressed to Qazi Shamsuddin, administrator of Chausa. Obviously he was in Chausa, not Bihar Sharif, in 1346-7 A.D. when the letters were composed and dispatched. His duties—fortunately for us—kept him in Chausa. It is clear that Sharafuddin thought highly enough of Qazi Shamsuddin to send him a long series of letters of spiritual advice. These form, in fact, an exposition of the Way of a Sufi as understood and practised by Sharafuddin Maneri, founder of the Firdausi Order in Bihar. Although this Order has remained mainly confined to Bihar, the fame of its founder is unrivalled among the Sufis of Bihar and extends beyond the confines of this state.

Sharafuddin's correspondence with Qazi Shamsuddin did not cease when, in 1347 A.D., the last of the *Hundred letters* was dispatched to him. In the later collection of *Two Hundred Letters* as has been noted—letter 26 refers to the uninterrupted flow of letters from Sharafuddin to him while, in letter 31, his guide chides him gently for his bashfulness in revealing his difficulties to him.

In the meantime, the *Hundred Letters* were referred to in the assemblies presided over by Sharafuddin and clarifications were sought. For example, on one occasion somebody said :

> "In that well-known collection of letters sent to Qazi Shamsuddin, the administrator of Chausa, the Venerable Master wrote that both conventional faith (īmān-i muqallid) and the faith of a mystic mean the same thing. I do not understand this, for there is a world of difference between the faith of a mystic and that of an ordinary believer. How can it be correct to equate them ?"
>
> The Venerable Master replied : "It is exactly as it is written there. As far as meaning is concerned, the faith of an ordinary believer, in comparison to the infidelity of an infidel, is faith, and its resultant fruit is entry into Paradise. To be content with this, however, is to be satisfied with little. As far as this group (i.e. the members of the Firdausi Order)

> is concerned, it is not lawful for a seeker to remain content with this low degree of faith." (*Mūnis* 16, pp. 114-6)

It seems that Qazi Shamsuddin took his spiritual discipleship very seriously. His attention was gradually drawn more to the Sufi Way and to his beloved spiritual guide, Sharafuddin Maneri, than to his official duties. Some ten years after receiving the *Hundred Letters* we find his name among the disciples who were asking questions in the assemblies. His questions show that he was interested in a whole range of topics, from an enquiry as to whether people who were granted mystical revelations discover their real meaning from the text of the Quran down to what sort of behaviour was expected of a disciple who came to an assembly after everybody else was seated.

It is not possible to say for certain that Qazi Shamsuddin spent all his time during the last twenty-two years of Sharafuddin's life in Bihar Sharif itself, but the frequent appearance of his name, and his presence at the death-bed of his beloved spiritual guide, indicate at least that he spent extended periods of time there. It is interesting to notice that he retained the title, "Administrator of Chausa"—as the above excerpt, dated 1373 A.D. indicates—even when he was no longer exercising this function, as the evidence suggests, for it had been his official duties which kept him away from Bihar Sharif in the forties.

His master was obviously pleased with him. As Sharafuddin lay dying, he called him his 'son', and said he had often referred to him as his 'son' or 'brother' in his letters. He also said explicitly that he was the cause of his making manifest the knowledge of the Sufis (i.e. in the *Letters*) little realizing what an important Sufi text his collection was to become.

It is Sharafuddin's profound personal knowledge of the Way, as shared originally with Qazi Shamsuddin, that we are about to study in the third and last part of this work. The exposition is in three chapters : "Setting out along the Way"; "Provisions for the Journey;" and "Facing Dangers and Growing". The study concludes with an epilogue.

PART THREE

THE WAY

4

Setting out Along the Way

The Call to the Way

The central image of *The Hundred Letters* is that of a man travelling along the Way that leads to God. The novice sets out along this Way. He becomes a pilgrim, a traveller, but certainly not a tourist, for it is not what he sees along the way that is of prime importance, but that which lies at the end. He is travelling in a definite direction in order to reach his destination. He needs provisions for his jounery and, as he goes along, he meets many people. He has obstacles to face and overcome and wildernesses to traverse. He can expect to be attacked by bandits along the way and will have to keep a sharp eye out for pitfalls of various kinds. Since he has never been along this particular road before, it helps very much if he manages to secure a guide for himself. It is even better if he can acquire an escort as well, for this will ensure his safety when he reaches lonely spots along the road, where bands of robbers lie in wait to plunder him as they have already done to many others who have preceded him.

In view of all these hardships which Sharafuddin says a novice is certain to encounter, why does a novice set out in the

first place ? Why shouldn't he remain at home, safe and sound with his family, living an honourable and peaceful life ? Why should he even think of abandoning all this in order to venture along an unknown road ? If he simply wants the thrill of travelling, he can join the company of such distinguished itinerant scholars as Ibn Batutta, or some rich merchant's caravan as it sets out for unknown places. If he aspires to adventures like those of Sindbad and others, he can set sail for distant lands. But no, some choose to burn their boats behind them and set out for the utterly inknown, along a perilous Way, with no guarantees and no insurance schemes to fall back on. The question is "Why" ?

For Sharafuddin it is Faith that sets out on this journey. (22)[1] If we enquire about what inspired Faith to undertake such as arduous journey, he replies that nothing less than the grace of God, stirring in a person's heart, can produce this effect. (25) Once people are moving along the Way, it is impossible to predict when God's grace will descend and sweep them towards Himself with an irrestible yearning. (37) Morever, it is Faith itself that shows the Way to God. (23) Such Faith is not the normal, conventional variety, but one alive to God.

While writing about the qualifications of a sheikh he says that a certain uneasiness arises within a person and this leads to activity which culminates in love. (32) In other words, a person sets out along the Way because he is not content with what he or she has been or is being offered in terms of a normal career in this world. The person yearns for more.

It is Sharafuddin's conviction that there always have been people of this stamp and, presumably, always will be. Writing on the origin of mysticism, he asserts that the Way began with Adam and reached its completion in Muhammad. It thereafter remained as a feature of the Muslim community. He reiterates that God has chosen and called people for this work down the centuries, and underlines the fact that the initiative lay with

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1. The numbers refer to the page of the persent writer's *Sharafuddin Maneri* : *The Hundred Letters*, Paulist Press, New York, & S.P.C.K., London, 1980, where the teaching is found. (also B. Y. B., Bombay, 1985).

Him. (91) the clearly affirms that it is God who calls a person to this Way and he is personally convinced that He has been doing so from the time of Adam himself.

This position is further clarified when he discusses the situation of someone who takes it upon himself to set out along the Way without having been called by God. He says that such a person is in grave danger of being lost, for he is likely to succumb to the temptation of undertaking spectacular austerities which could result in pride and even loss of faith. (92)

By asserting, in very strong terms, the dangers that lie in store for anyone who undertakes the works of the Way on his own initiative, without the call having come from God, Sharafuddin reveals another conviction about the type of people who are, in point of fact, called by God to this Way. He has said that no permission has been given to any foolish person, untouched by divine knowledge and completely ignorant of the Law, to set out upon this Way. Immediately after describing the downfall of such a man, he asserts that God Almighty has never made an ignorant fellow a saint, nor would He ever do so. He then quotes from the Quran : "God has not befriended an ignorant man." (Q. 17, III) He says that the reason for this is that all baseness can be traced back to ignorance.

This raises a fundamental question about Sharafuddin's teaching : "Is everything so utterly dependent on God's will alone that man has nothing at all to do ?" As we have seen, he undoubtedly teaches that the call comes initially from God. Time and again he says that God makes things easy for anyone whom He calls to travel along the Way, for this is the purpose for which he has been created. (419) Sharafuddin explains that this is because God behaves towards such a person in the same way as a mother does towards her small son. She protects him from what would harm him, and provides for his needs. (97). The final stage reached by a Sufi is even more clearly from God, for in it he loses all self-awareness in total union with Him. (14).

There is a beautiful passage which seems to asserts that God does everything to such an extent that man has nothing at all to contribute. Sharafuddin refers to conversions which

utterly transformed people without their seemingly having done anything. Man can give no explanation for such instances, for God is not constrained by human categories. (24)

The sovereign activity of God and His absolute freedom to act as He pleases is strongly affirmed. Moreover, reasons and motives find no place in God—they are subsumed by the mystery of His sovereign good-pleasure. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to assert that man has nothing to contribute. The example itself refers to someone who is mistakenly worshipping is, an idol but, worships, after all, a human activity. We are told that idol worshippers seek God in idols, while Christians seek Him in Jesus. (177) Obviously seeking God, calling upon Him and so on, are human activities. It must also be noticed that the context always needs to be examined. Sharafuddin, aware of the difficulty involved in travelling along the Way, says that people should not worry too much about what particular state they are in. They should realize that any form of mystical knowledge of God is a gift from Him, not payment for labours undertaken on His behalf. A person 'sees' God, not so much because he or she is looking for Him, but because He chooses to show Himself to the person. (177)

This teaching is meant to bring much peace to the heart of the pilgrim, urging him, as it implicitly does, to focus his attention on God rather than on his own efforts. He puts it beautifully in his letter on hope and fear, saying that a person's hope in God should be such that, if all the sins of the world were his, and he were to hear a heavenly voice proclaim that only one person would enter Heaven, he would know that he was that person. (320) It would be very difficult to find a more graphic illustration of the absolute hope in God which he inculcates in his teaching. He can say this because the more a disciple really relies on God and not on his own efforts the more he is, in actual fact, united to God and shares already, to some degree, in the absoluteness of His power. Nevertheless, he does not for a moment say that the wayfarer should ever cease searching for God.

Not merely should the note of encouragement be pointed out in the above passage but what follows also calls for our

attention. He informs Qazi Shamsuddin that resolute courage is not granted to one and all. There has to be a real capacity to receive such a gift.

A modifying factor is thus introduced in the form of the human dimension. Here the quality of courage is singled out and stated to be of such a resolute nature as to be undaunted by whatever obstacle comes in its way. Clearly, not all men possess such a quality. Not everyone can put on a brave front and resolve to reach the Goal or die in the attempt. (69)

In addition to certain qualities of heart those of the head are also required. The assertion that God would never make an ignorant person a saint (93) is of great significance, for it shifts from an assertion of fact to one about the intrinsic nature of something. Logically, if it is asserted that God would never make an ignorant fellow a saint it is because He is not able to do so. The authority of the sheikhs is claimed for this assertion and the Quran itself is quoted; "God has not befriended an ignorant man." (Q 17, III) Shortly afterwards we read that any traveller along this Way should be an intelligent person. A little reflection will make one realize that no great religion has acknowledged anybody as a saint who was patently stupid. Of course, varying degrees of intelligence and knowledge are found among the saints, and most of them were far above average intelligence, but it would be difficult to produce anyone whose intelligence was far below par. Any experienced spiritual director will agree that a certain amount of intelligence is a necessary prerequisite for making the type of progress in the spiritual life which can lead to sanctity.

This same letter (no. 23) helps us perceive that Sharafuddin is concerned with what is 'normal' in the mystical endeavour, for he asserts that an experienced guide along the Way is, apart from a rare exception, an absolute necessity if one is to reach God. (94) It is because he is convinced that a spiritual guide is needed for the average disciple that he devotes so many letters to this topic and keeps on referring frequently to this need. On the other hand, his brief allusion to the rare exception reminds us that, in any case, such a person is likely to be an ecstatic who will be of little use to others, for an ecstatic

experience, and even an ecstatic condition, does not mean that a person has the ability to analyse, on the basis of long, personal experience, what principles are involved in such matters. Ecstasy, of itself, does not qualify a person to be a spiritual guide. (67-8)

Coming back to our question, "Is everything so utterly dependent on God's will alone that man has nothing at all to do ?" the answer must be a clear negative. While in no way wishing to limit the sovereign power of God, Sharafuddin asserts clearly that man has a very real role to play. He presupposes qualities of mind and heart without which no substantial progress can be expected on the part of a disciple. In a broader perspective, his entire teaching effort, together with each quotation he makes from the Quran, Tradition or the fund of Sufi sources he is acquainted with, presupposes that he has something to say to man who must, in turn, be able to understand what he is saying, otherwise it would be pointless either for him to write or for people to study his writings. It was mainly the many long years of earnest effort which, under the guidance of Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi and crowned by divine grace, enabled him to give meaningful advice and encouragement to his disciples. Finally, it should be noted that the four decades or more devoted to teaching, some of which was in written form, constitute an irrefutable assertion that man has a role to play, otherwise all this effort directed to explaining the Way to others and encouraging them along it would be utter nonsense.

The First Step—Repentance

In his second letter Sharafuddin te!ls us that repentance actually means "turning back", but that there are many ways of doing this, depending on different types of people, and taking into account their actual religious condition. (16) He goes on to mention that ordinary people are moved to repentance out of fear of punishment. This presupposes that the ordinary people referred to are Muslims. Otherwise, if they are infidels, it means that they renounce their infidelity and become true believers. We can presume that he has ordinary people in

mind when he says that sinners should turn aside from their sins and observe God's commandments. (16) Certainly those who have been called to the Way should also do so, but they have become more aware of God, and that He wants them to revere Him and live holy lives. (16)

Two important elements are found here. Firstly, there has been a switch from God's commandments to God Himself. Clearly, a new dimension has entered into their lives, that of a personal relationship to God, their Lord and Master. No longer is it enough to be like a good soldier who wants to carry out somewhat impersonal standing orders, for it is not so much the order that now counts as the fact that it emanates from their Master and it is for His sake that they wish to be faithful to whatever is commanded. It must also be noticed that yet another rather subtle but nonetheless important change has occurred. It could be expressed thus : Continuing the image of standing orders for a soldier, we might say that it is good for a soldier to carry them out. Similarly, it is actually good for a man to carry out the instructions concerning his very own being that have been revealed in the Law. It is quite another matter, however, to become obedient out of a realization of an obligation of reverence to one's Master. He wants me to do something and I owe it to Him to do so. Put in other words, we do it because of a stirring of love and reverence for Him that has arisen within us.

Secondly, we have to notice the aspect of the obligation that has been singled out for special mention--that of reverence. This is not conventional reverence, taught by such practices as removing one's footwear before entering a mosque. This is a reverence that has originated from within, as part and parcel of the special call to follow the Way. It could be described as a 'touch' of divine grace.

One of the practical difficulties associated with repentance is that, although a novice would like to repent once and for all, he quickly discovers that this simply does not happen in real life. If he has the habit of committing some particular sin it might take a long time, and many another fall, before it is over-

come. Sharafuddin tells of a saintly person who had to repent seventy times of his repeated falls, but then fell no more.

It is easy for a saintly person to relate difficulties he used to experience, but someone caught up in a desperate struggle with self might easily succumb to the suggestion that repentance is pointless because he knows he is very likely to sin again. (20) Sharafuddin takes up this challenge immediately, insisting that such ideas are Satanic deceptions designed to prevent a person from repenting of past sins. He also adds that the fear of sinning again is itself a sign of sincere repentance. As a spiritual guide he would often have had to repeat these words of assurance to his novices and others who came to him with their tales of woe. He is very quick to perceive even a modicum of good-will in a person, and anyone struggling generously to overcome a particular sinful habit is certainly displaying more than a modicum of good-will—which he is quick to point out. As a word of encouragement he reminds his reader that God alone can effect the radical transformation of a person's heart. (20) By implication, this is not what normally happens. The novice has to play his role, that of the struggling penitent. Sharafuddin will describe later on, in detail, the struggle in its various phases. To begin with, a novice will have to "break in" his carnal soul as a horseman breaks in a wild stallion. In the beginning this will be concerned with obviously sinful habits, or with a basic weakness which results in some sinful tendency. More delicate matters will gradually make their appearance and have to be dealt with.

For Sharafuddin there will always be a further stage to be reached. This is clear from what he writes in the second letter, for he insists that people should always press on, and certainly not a fall back to some previous stage. That would be sinful. He leaves no room for complacency as he urges people to press ahead. (16) Clearly, although a disciple might succeed in overcoming his sinful habits, there will always be some repentance, some turning-away from what-is-not-God as long as he is on this earth. One will always have one's own existence, and Sharafuddin agrees with Junaid in praising this couplet :

When I enquired about my sins, Love replied

"Your existence is a sin that cannot be compared to others."

This couplet illustrates, in very graphic terms, how it is that we will always have something other-than-God to turn away from, even if that 'something' is nothing other than our very own existence.

At a more practical level, for the time being, is Sharafuddin's statement, in the third letter, that, for the beginner the essential aspect of repentance is an earnest resolution to abandon sin. (20) The letter gives instructions as to how one can show the earnestness of one's resolve to abandon sin. This is acheived not merely by a cry for forgiveness from God Almighty but also by an attempt to rectify, as far as humanly possible, the damage wrought by one's sins. For example, if a person has stolen something, it is necessary to return it to its rightful owner. What should you do if you are not in a position to return stolen goods to their owner ? You should ask the owner to remit your debt. What if the lawful owner has died in the meantime ? Do some deeds of charity for the welfare of his soul. And if you are not in a position to do even that ? Do more good works, seeking pardon for him as he stands in judgement. It is obvious that he is perfectly sincere in demanding that every effort be made to rectify, on the human level, the evil effects wrought by sin. Other examples only serve to reinforce this teaching.

He sums up by saying that one's aim must be to make peace with all, especially with anybody who has a legitimate grievance against one. He adds that he should be confident that the Lord Himself will come to the aid of such a one by granting the grace of forgiveness to any adversary. Thus, on the Day of Judgement, there will be nobody to stand up and point an accusing finger at him on account of some unrequited wrong.

The slave of sin, however, is heading for calamity. First comes the sin of hardening one's heart which ultimately leads to abandoning one's faith and coming to a wretched end.

This same third letter has a beautiful passage about how a disciple, as he steps out along the Way, can express in a very

sincere manner—after having observed the steps to reconciliation that have been enjoined upon him—his genuine sorrow for all his past sins. He is recommended to go to some quiet place where he can prostrate himself, throw dust on his head and bewail, one by one, all the sins of his past life. The result will be that he will emerge purified from his sins as though this was the very day his mother had given birth to him. God will take him for His friend and lavish rewards and merits upon him in addition to blessings far and above what he could lay claim to.

The fourth letter adds another important aspect to Sharafuddin's teaching on repentance. He explains to us that the reality of repentance consists in altering one's own nature. He says that a novice undergoes a forty-day retreat for the total transformation of his nature. (23) Here it is stated that one's nature is 'transformed', thus implying the divine activity. What precisely Sharafuddin has in mind is explained more in detail in the letter on the forty-day retreat itself, treated in the following chapter. The 'turning back' involved in this transformation can be understood only in so far as the transformation itself is explained, in the chapter referred to.

Sharafuddin has one brief but important contribution to make to the seemingly academic but, in practice, very important question of whether or not to keep our past sins in mind as we progress on the 'Way' to God. He informs us that Master Suhail Tustari, along with many others, is of the opinion that people should not forget the sins of the past but keep them continually in mind. The reason is to prevent them from growing proud. This seems sensible enough, but he adds that Master Junaid and others think that repentance means forgetting entirely about sins of the past. This is because the whole endeavour of a Sufi is to become a lover. This opinion also has much merit to it. On the other hand, a lover should keep his past infidelities in mind, according to Sharafuddin, who then goes on to say that the seemingly contradictory nature of the two positions vanishes if people take 'forgetting' to mean that the attraction of sin must be expunged from one's heart. This implies an ever-increasing love of God in compari-

son to which sins lose their attraction. (17) This solution is born of deep, personal insight.

The reason for making this assertion is quite simple. Although it is within man's power to say 'No' when he is tempted, it is not within his power to expunge the attraction exercised by sin. What can and does take place is that it is subsumed by a far more powerful attraction—that of God Himself. Sharafuddin's solution is founded on this attraction, and is an implicit avowal that he himself has felt it.

Finding a Guide

Having both felt the call to the Way and repented of his sinful past, the novice must busy himself in trying to find a spiritual guide. Sharafuddin insists on some form of guidance. He maintains that it is common teaching that no one can reach God without the assistance of an experienced guide, though he is prepared to concede that there may be a 'rare exception'. The crucial importance of finding a spiritual guide is so obvious in Sharafuddin's mind that it would be fatuous to summon texts to prove it. Not only does he treat the topic formally in individual letters, but also refers to it so frequently that scarcely a page goes by without our coming across a reference to the spiritual guide. It will be helpful to examine why he gives so much prominence to finding one.

Firstly, the beginner has to search for a guide. Clearly, this involves human activity. The next question is rather obvious : "Where will a novice find a sheikh or religious leader ?" Allied to this is another question : "How can he recognize him as being the man for him ?" The answer he comes up with seems rather strange. He says that God himself has to help out in this matter. Yet, just as surely as man has his role to play in finding a guide, so too does God help out in this matter, obviously by means of His special grace of inspiration. He further elaborates his answer by stating that everyone who seeks God will receive all that he needs along the Way. (32)

Before getting exasperated with this answer—God will provide—it will be instructive to listen to some of the remarks he

makes, especially with regard to recognizing the guide God has destined for the beginner. He says that it is not fitting for a novice to go around making judgements about various spiritual guides and giving his opinion about who has become God's intimate. Nor does physical appearance help, for there are no physical traits which clearly indicate that a person is a spiritual guide. He does admit, later on in the same letter, that there are many signs, but there is no single one we could point to and say, "This certainly shows he is a sheikh". His real answer is found in the same letter when he says, in simple language, that the novice feels a great attraction for a particular guide and confidently entrusts himself to him. Again, we find here an echo of his own experience. Only when he came to Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi was his heart stirred. There was not a shadow of doubt in his mind that Najibuddin was meant to be his guide.

It was precisely because Sharafuddin had himself benefited so greatly from the guidance and inspiration of Najibuddin that he insists on the need for an experienced guide for others as well. He wants them to be helped as he had been. He maintains that ecstatics are wholly incapable of guiding others because, even though they are filled with a tremendous longing for God, and have even passed beyond all other stages, still, precisely because they did not themselves pass through the various states and stages, they are unware of them. They were, so to say, swept off their feet but, in the process, were deprived of the advantage of an orderly, guided progress along the Way. Sharafuddin had been greatly impressed by the evident holiness of Bu Qalandar Panipati but had no time for him as a spiritual guide, for he was generally lost in God. His own opinion is that a sheikh should be someone who makes an orderly progress towards deeper union with God, even if he has a deep-felt yearning for Him.

Even a sheikh's own mistakes can be helpful in guiding others, for he himself can learn valuable lessons by wandering off the Way for a time. The sureness of touch with which Sharafuddin describes some of the dangers along the Way,

particularly the most subtle imaginable, indicates that he had learnt his lessons the hard way.

Sharafuddin, while writing on discipleship, paints a brief but clear picture of the heart of a sincere young novice. He says that discipleship is a matter of wanting something from the heart. As we become aware of beautiful objects, a stirring occurs within our hearts. The more noble the object, the more noble the stirrings. A person who desires Reality itself will be helped by God, for such a desire is pure, stripped of anything base, or even of motives, and is free from inconstancy. (34)

The trouble is that it is not at all easy to acquire—if we can talk in such terms—that pure and constant desire of Reality itself. In actual fact a young novice comes along with a whole lot of selfish motives intimately interwoven with his genuine yearning for God. His spiritual guide can help him unravel and deal with these 'false gods', as Sharafuddin would call them, one by one. He groups a whole lot of them together as the 'desire of the world.' He calls the desire of a person totally immersed in seeking the world an unmitigated disaster and a mortal illness. The novice certainly has to do battle with this desire, for it is the greatest obstacle to progress in virtue.

Sharafuddin shows great spiritual perception when he singles out one particular desire that might be the cause of a novice's lack of progress : the desire of a good name, or of praise. In other words, a person wants to be thought well of by men. The person's heart is not wedded to attaining union with God. Sharafuddin has himself experienced the heady wine of the acclamation of the people and knows how easily a person's head can be turned. He refers to this danger several times and praises the 'hidden sanctity' of men like Oveis Qarani and Hilal.

The novice's intention has to be purified of all pleasures and self-interest—a formidable programme indeed ! Wise assistance from an experienced guide will certainly be needed if much potential harm is to be obviated.

Another category of desire is that for the things to come. There are people who shun this world as an object worth desiring, but are mightily keen on acquiring the joys of the world to come. Such people are ready to deny themselves pleasures now in view of others to come. For Sharafuddin this is still a form of self-seeking, even through it is something laudable. For him the real desire is for God Himself. Moreover he is convinced that anybody who seeks the Lord of both worlds himself gains honour in both. We can readily agree with him when he remarks that nothing is more important than a compassionate guide.

Novitiate Training

Sharafuddin talks about a novice's having to spend three years in three types of training : service of the people : devotion to God; and discerning the movements of one's heart. He also presents us with letters on these very topics. From these we can understand the sort of thing he has in mind in this period of training.

Both letters 38 and 39 are devoted to the topic of service. From these we can get some idea of why the first year should be devoted to service, and what exactly this service entails.

Sharafuddin informs us that man's felicity lies in service, and goes on to add that God created men to be His servants. (145) What is more, service enables a person to attain freedom, for only a servant can become free. Moreover, until this occurs a person cannot experience the joy of union with God. (146) People dedicated to service are the real lords of this world. Muhammad is quoted as having preferred service to dominion in both this world and the next. It will be said that it was on account of his service that he was clothed with a special robe of honour, which has previously been mentioned as referring to a stage very close to God Himself. His position is that a person's progress and salvation depend on the grade of service which has been attained.

Appealing to common experience, he invites his reader to reflect on the fact that nothing more endears a person of no

means to a well-to-do one than devoted service. Sharafuddin's readers—many of whom were men in authority—would know exactly what he was talking about, although they would probably get quite a jolt to hear that real men consider themselves to be a hundred times more despicable than ordinary Muslims consider pagans, Jews and Christians to be. (148) He drives home his point still further by saying that, until a man considers himself to be devoid of qualities, so that no scope for indignity could be found in him, then he still has a long way to go. In other words, as long as you consider yourself somebody, you are really a nobody in the sight of God.

Sharafuddin's idea of service is so intimately joined with utter self-negation that he can insist that a person who has not yet been rejected at every door, taken for counterfeit coinage in every hand and become valueless in every scale, should not think that his service has been tried and made sound. Here he is stressing that by denying self in order to serve others one can succeed in belittling oneself in one's own estimation, i.e. by passing through the crucible of denying what is a persons's most precious possession—freedom to choose exactly what he or she will do !

In letter 39 we find more insights into the value of service as a potent means of training a novice for the Way. Sharafuddin says that we should be firmly convinced of the need to taste the sorrow of service—the sorrow springing from our inability to do what we would like to. He illustrates this by asking his reader to reflect on what it means to be a slave. Slaves have tongues, but are in no position to ask questions. He is exaggerating when he says that a person who is given sherbet to drink, or poison, should accept it willingly. (149) Elsewhere he insists, for example, that no one should infringe any commandment of the Law, nor overlook any point of obedience, no matter how minute it might be. (314) Suicide would, of course, be a heinous crime for a Muslim.

Sharafuddin describes the feelings of a slave, pointing out how impossible it is for him to even think of giving vent to them. His existence is for the sake of service, not self-expression. (150) Although this may be placed as an ideal before the

novice, he certainly will not attain such dispositions until he has long exercised himself in the service of others, which is the very first part of his training. Sharafuddin relates a delightful story that indicates that such dispositions are acquired only at a later stage in one's pilgrimage. (151).

Sharafuddin comes back explicitly to service in a third letter. He writers of the many benefits and special favours found in service but not in other forms of devotion or submission. The point he makes is that is a wonderful antidote to all forms of pride and haughtiness.

Service leads to genuine humility which, in turn, makes a person light-hearted and radiant, both internally and externally. (293) This teaching records a gradual change-over from the persevering efforts of the pilgrim to the rewards that he begins to experience in a radiance of soul that shows itself on his very face. This is a state which he does not acquire in his first year, but only at a much later stage, for it takes more than a year to "crush one's selfish soul," as his many letters on this topic clearly indicate. Still, he does assert that this radiance is a reward for fidelity in genuine, humble service which emanates from a person's heart.

He specifies this when he says that the pre-condition of service, however, is to abandon entirely one's own wishes, desires and even control over one's affairs. All this is to be replaced by a life according to the desires of the group. It is comparatively easy for a first-year novice to abandon control over his own affairs, for they do not normally amount to much. As he makes progress in the spiritual life, however, and grows in knowledge and experience, and keeps on advancing in the hierarchy of the group, this abandonment, if practised in the entirety enjoined by Sharafuddin, costs him progressively more and more in human terms and hence becomes an ever more potent instrument with which to deal with the final enemy—inordinate self-love. Such people, freed from all anxiety concerning their own spiritual condition, can devote themselves to service. In this way they can obtain all that others do by various forms of austerities. Sufi centres, hospices and endow-

ments have all been established so that people may have opportunities to serve. (294).

He is saying something very profound here, something referring to the whole Sufi way of life as known to him, as the institutions mentioned indicate. He is not thinking simply in terms of a first-year novitiate programme. The reason for saying this is very simple. Any professional man or artist is concerned with making progress in his work or art. This will depend on continual practice coupled with an eagerness to improve his performance. An outstanding violinist, for example, is one who, by unrelenting practice, has absolutely mastered his instrument and by diligent enquiry and experimentation has so developed his technique that, when he comes to perform, his attention in no longer on either his instrument or his technique but is focused entirely on the piece he is playing. He plays like a man inspired and this is what grips his audience. A similar type of progress is required before a man, professionally dedicated to advancing along the Way to God, can become freed from all anxiety concerning his own spiritual condition and devote himself to service, according to the particular needs of others. Sharafuddin claims that the whole purpose of all Sufi establishments can be summed up in one word—service.

A genuine Sufi, therefore, is one whose life is dedicated to the service of others. The more famous he becomes, the more demands people will make on him. He will have to spend a large part of his day at their service, probably just as the desire to devote even more time to prayer grows within him. The wider his fame travels, the clearer does his real attitude towards being at the service of the people become.

Sharafuddin continues his unrelenting way by insisting that he should give up everything, even his own desires and inclinations, for the sake of others. The group takes precedence over himself in all circumstances. He does not refuse them in any matter, except what is forbidden by God. He touches another spiritual high point when he says that a person should, in fact, be grateful for whatever service he can perform for somebody else.

Such an attitude, if genuine, springs from a heart which is both astonished and stirred by a living experience of what God has accomplished therein. Descending to practicalities, he says that young people should all find some appropriate work to do for others. Nowadays, in our changed milieu, this practical hint, which is really a general principle, assumes considerable significance. It is up to the modern young person who would step out manfully along the Way to give serious consideration to what now constitutes appropriate work for others.

Sharafuddin's next warning is obviously for someone who has travelled some distance along the Way. He says that anybody who is unwilllng to devote himself to service, but yearns for others to serve him, will never become perfect. What is more, he will become heavy-hearted. This is like a fever in someone's soul. (295) In his fifth letter he referred to such a condition in more advanced disciples, and mentioned how helpful a spiritual guide could be for a person who has managed to avoid misfortune and pass successfully through various trials only to succumb to lassitude. (26) This condition is well known to masters of the spiritual life. Its technical term is 'acedia'. It is a condition that afflicts people who have made progress in the spiritual life. This particular state presupposes much service—hence the desire to have others "do their bit"—as well as much struggle with self, application to study and persevering prayer. Put in other words, a person has done his or her level best to tread faithfully the Way to God. The trouble is that in spite of all these sincere and devoted efforts, union with God has not been attained. To be sure, the person has had many consolations, but has by no means been swept off his feet by the wonderful graces he has read and heard about in the lives of the great saints and renowned mystics. He even begins to doubt the very existence of those special favours which have been so lovingly described by the mystics. He begins to think he should make his move while there is yet time, for the world, which begins to appear extremely attractive to him, is passing him by. He has shunned it for all these years of earnest quest. Has he been duped ?

As is obvious, probably at no other time during his whole passage along the Way does he stand in greater need of a spiritual guide than at such a moment. He is very much on the brink—of either going his way, or of going God's Way. What has happened is that he has "played himself out". He has done everything within his power to become united to God but seemingly failed in his endeavour. It was necessary for him to reach the point of realizing that it was not by reading or hearing about denying self, or by thinking or praying about it, or even by doing it, but ultimately by experiencing, for himself, that he, in spite of all his efforts, simply cannot achieve the goal he imagined he could. In this soil of radical humility the seed of mystical illumination can be sown and quickly germinate. The pilgrim is now capable of attaining the higher stages Sharafuddin mentions in his first letter, provided he has not got stalled in acedia. Clearly, it would be sad if a person who is on the brink of deep mystical knowledge should abandon the Way through lack of an experienced guide. The guide could reassure him that the very moment when all seems lost and futile is the most potentially fruitful moment in his whole spiritual life. He has also given us this sound advice that, if tempted to laziness, a novice's protection should be that he should not alter in his purpose even by so much as a hair's breadth. (148)

It is evident that Sharafuddin himself went through this dark cloud before he emerged from self into skies bathed with heavenly illumination. He who had laboured so unrelentingly at self-control, both under the guidance of Najibuddin and in solitude, could write authoritatively that sanctity is not born from efforts at self-control or from austerities. (83) This was what he himself had learned in a process similar to the one just outlined.

One final remark about service is certainly worth noticing. Sharafuddin mentions that anyone who is greatly devoted to service is held to be tender-hearted, as a result of which people are more inclined to pay attention to such a person. (296) Happy indeed is the man or woman who has had the privilege of experiencing, in his or her own life, disinterested service born

of love. Such people will understand what Sharafuddin is talking about.

We were told that, after the first year with its emphasis on service, the second year of the novitiate was to be devoted to God. Presumably this refers to work which is directly ordained to God Himself, namely prayer and worship. Sharafuddin has much to say on these topics, but we would probably do best to begin our study by glancing at letter 28, devoted to "Arranging one's Occupations at the Beginning." Here the emphasis is on the novice's keeping himself, through ablutions, ritually pure, so that he may be continually engaged in prayer. He should never seek to escape from any of the five canonical daily prayers. He should occupy himself with prayer and those ejaculations which he has determined for himself, or which his guide has instructed him to say. He should recite the divine praises and beg continuously for forgiveness for his past sins. (111) Other injunctions could be quoted to show that there is a very full programme of prayer outlined for the beginner.

Although prayer is certainly his main activity, other forms of spiritual exercises are also prescribed, such as restraining one's speech; praying for others; talking about spiritual topics; or instructing someone in need of religious knowledge. He can also be occupied in visiting holy tombs, conversing with his spiritual guide, or with a doctor of divinity if the opportunity arises. In fact, this would be more profitable than remaining forever on a prayer-mat, preoccupied with the praises of God. (112) Nevertheless, although all these practices are recommended in addition to prayer, and although Sharafuddin clearly states that one should not remain forever on a prayer-mat, he goes on to say that, when the novice is not occupied with such-like things, he should seat himself on his prayer-mat and devote himself to remembering God, for this is the most profitable of all activities. Prayer clearly has top priority in such a programme, but Sharafuddin wants it to be a balanced one.

One other important practice is mentioned in this letter. Sharafuddin would have the novice develop the habit of reflecting on how he has passed each day. At sunset he should consider carefully with his soul how the day has gone, seeking

to discern what profit or loss he has sustained. (113) Obviously, this is a habit he wants the novice to continue throughout his life. We can be reasonably certain that he himself had such a habit which enabled him to reflect on his experiences and draw lessons from both his successes and failures.

Being an intelligent and sensitive man he would have been keen on tracking down, in so far as he could, the causes of both. In this way his own grasp of the principles of the spiritual life, so admirably displayed in his letters, would have been born. As always, his studies helped him in this area too, but his grasp of principle is too sure and secure to have resulted simply from reading. As time went on, he would have been able to verify principles through his work of directing countless disciples.

More could be said about prayer and worship, but this shall have to suffice as its importance is universally accepted. It should be remarked that the emphasis is heavily on the praying activity of the novice. There is no short-cut offered. Prayer is a labour for the novice, even though he will surely, from time to time, experience the sweetness of the Lord.

The third year is to be spent in watching over one's heart. "What does this entail ?" The answer is connected with that of the following question: "Why has a novice spent a whole year in service of others, and another whole year in prayer ? Is it really because his desire is for God himself ?" Sharafuddin presumes that the basic answer to this question is in the affirmative, but he is far too wise and experienced to imagine that this motive is in no way tinged with lesser ones. These have to be identified, by the spiritual guide of course, and brought to the novice's attention, or even treated directly, according to what the guide judges will be best for the novice. The gradual purification of a disciple's intention requires time, patience, and guidance. This is why, after letter 28, which we have already taken notice of, Sharafuddin gives us no fewer than three letters devoted to purity.

We are to be convinced that a man's worth is to be measured according to his purity. (115) The first step is to see that one's body, clothes and food are pure and lawful. In other words, all that has been laid down in the Law has to be observed in these matters. Then a person's senses should all be purified of sin and rebellion. This was the very first step we saw, that of repentance. Things like avarice, jealousy and rancour should not contaminate a person's heart. Hopefully, these obvious defects will have been brought to heel during the first two years of novitiate, at least to a considerable extent. Sharafuddin goes on to call this whole process a 'revolution.' (116) He explains that this means that a person has changed from his state of being unclean to being pure. He now stands at the head of the lane that leads to mystical knowledge of God. He is, however, thoroughly convinced that, without this purity, whatever he does is mere habit picked up from others. He pointedly remarks that a person has to actually fling himself or herself into the fray, not merely read about the spiritual exploits of others. This is not enough to make them real. He thus underlines an important lesson for the novice who imagines that reading about some spiritual reality is the same as experiencing it for himself.

In the following letter the same theme is taken up, with special reference to purity of heart as a prerequisite for genuine mystical knowledge. (117) In a sense even thinking about the world is a form of pollution, for the world is polluted in so far as it is not-God, and thinking about it is polluting in so far as it takes our hearts and minds away from God. Sharafuddin has more to say about the world, but these few remarks will have to suffice. He immediately gives an indication that this is not the whole story when he describes what a heart, purified of any desire that could stain it in the least, is like. He compares it to a clean, shining mirror in which a person can see a reflection of the world of creatures and of the divine command. (118) Thus the world, of itself, does not pollute the heart of man. No sane spirituality, in fact, could ever teach that it did.

The next letter in the trio is devoted explicitely to "Purity of Intention." We are asked to realize that the powerful deeds

and actions of a disciple draw their strength from the purity of intention with which they are performed. (120) In other words, the more our intention is, in reality, what we profess it to be in words—directed entirely towards God himself, without any admixture of self-interest—then the more swiftly do all our actions actually bear us ever closer to the brink of union. On the other hand, actions or deeds which are bereft of a pure intention are utterly useless. In fact, they are dead.

An interesting division of sincerity of intention is introduced. When purified of the impurities of the world, it is the sincerity of the abstinent ones. When cleansed of the imperfections of the last things, it is known as the sincerity of the mystics. Sharafuddin is consistent in his position, however, for he is talking of those whose only purpose or intention in life is to seek the Lord. These are the audacious ones, whose feet are planted on earth, but whose gaze is beyond the next world. He asserts, with confidence, that everything such people do is purely and simply for God. This is the goal of all attempts to purify one's intention and can only, as it were, be gazed at from afar by ordinary mortals. They have to struggle through the stage where desire and love of the world still hold sway, thus rendering all the actions and deeds which proceed from these worldly—even prayer and fasting. This is a strong indictment, but one made on the basis of much personal experience of the vagaries of the human heart.

Contrast this group with the next where the desire and love of the last things gain the ascendency in a person's heart. Whatever originates from such a heart would bear the stamp of the life to come, even eating and sleeping. This teaching is enough to make us realize why the third year of the novitiate is devoted to watching over one's heart, for it is clearly the real intention of a person's heart which gives spiritual quality to his action rather than the nature of the work itself—presuming, of course, that the work is morally good. Thus a high status can be meted out to eating and drinking, as well as to prayer and fasting.

There is no escaping the importance attributed to being able to discern the real intention of one's heart, for each per-

son will be judged by his purity of intention. It is only on the Day of Resurrection, when the veil is lifted, that a person's real worth will become known. This is expressed poetically :

When the dust settles you will quickly discover
Whether you are astride a horse or an ass ! (121)

Lest we be overawed by the prospect of comparing our own hearts with what we have just read Sharafuddin gives us a simple but encouraging story, pointing out that, in order to become a master calligraphist, much practice is needed.

This teaching is clear. We can note the effort demanded of the disciple, and the correcting role of the spiritual guide. Much experience lies behind these straight-forward yet profound lines. As always, he finishes the topic by underlining, yet more precisely, the importance of the role of the guide, by pointing out how important it is for a poor writer to have the help of an experienced teacher, otherwise he will never improve, even though he struggles along by himself for many a long year.

Sharafuddin's own summary of the topic, after even more stress has been placed on the need for a guide, bears quoting on account of its succinctness : "The whole purpose is that the deeds and actions of a disciple should be ruled by a right intention. The science of intention is a very refined and subtle one. As far as possible, one should be awake and alert, and try to ascertain the real nature of one's intentions. God willing, this aim is attainable." (123)

5

Provisions for the Journey

When a person has been called to the Way, repented of his past sins, found a guide and completed his initial training, he still has a long way to go. He needs provisions for his journey in the form of spiritual practices and helpful attitudes of mind. This chapter deals with such, under the following headings : "The Forty-Day Retreat" ; "Listening to Songs" ; "Begging" ; "Making no claims" ; "Contentment" ; "Coping with Fear ; "A Metaphysical Backdrop" ; and "Alone—or with Others".

The Forty-Day Retreat

One specific practice recommended by Sharafuddin is the forty-day retreat. In "The Renewal of Repentance" he writes : "Whoever commands a novice to undergo a forty-day retreat commands it for the sake of this change : in order that his very own nature might be transformed. When this total conversion has taken place he becomes another person, not in the sense that a different man appears in front of you but, because his qualities have changed, he too has changed. His essence remains the same but, in view of the change that has occurred, this fact is not of much consequence. Now a completely different faith appears, even though, before his conver-

sion, there had been nothing besides conventional faith and the uttering of words." (23)

The forty-day retreat is recommended to a novice as a means of transforming his entire nature so that he emerges a completely different man. The specific quality singled out for mention is his faith : it has changed from the mere uttering of words to "something completely different." This same point is highlighted when, in letter 96, "The Forty-Day Retreat", Sharafuddin tells us that disciples undertake it "in order that their faith might rest more secure; that they might be enabled therein to discern the various states of their souls; and, finally, in order that they might be able to perform all their actions sincerely for the sake of God Almighty." (402) He also teaches that the sign of a person's having made a whole-hearted retreat would be the fact that he begins to live a humble, well-disciplined and God-oriented life.

These are no mean expectations or signs ! Nowhere else in his letters does Sharafuddin refer to any other spiritual exercise which has the same potential for radical transformation in the comparatively short time of forty days. The type of life he describes can only be the effect of faith, not of all the reasoning in the world, and this is precisely what Sharafuddin says in both this letter and the fourth one. The faith referred to is the third stage already mentioned in the very first letter—the beginning of mystical contemplation. He expresses his conviction that a person will experience an attraction to God and that mystical illumination will simply be poured into him. (402) This attraction to God and abundance of mystical illumination indicate conclusively that the divine activity has, to some degree, 'taken over' in his life. This is what is meant. The implication is that a person's life is no longer self-centered, but flows outward towards God and his fellow human beings.

What makes impressive reading in this letter is the intermingling of extraordinary claims for the spiritual advantages of a retreat together with some very level-headed remarks made about it. In his opening sentence, for example, he says very bluntly that there is nothing special to a forty-day retreat which

cannot be attained outside it. Hence he does not claim that it is a "sine qua non" either for a person's salvation or progress in the spiritual life. A person's faith can be deepened and even transformed without his ever having made such a retreat. Having said this right at the very beginning, however, he proceeds to speak so highly of this practice as to make it perfectly obvious to one and all that only a fool would forego the opportunity of being granted so many blessings. A person would also have to be capable of performing such a strenuous exercise.

In the fourth letter he recommended it for novices, whereas here he recommends it for those advanced along the Way who being to experience difficulty in fidelity to prayer on account of boredom. He says it is good to abandon one's normal occupations and make a forty-day retreat. This should have a lasting, beneficial effect. (400) This recommendation, as well as a consideration of the place it occupies in the collection, makes us realize that it is a practice that can made use of at any time along the Way. "Who is it that drags the burden along this Way, if not Faith ?" he had asked in the fourth letter. No matter what stage a person may have reached it is always possible to find the 'burden' a bit heavy. In fact, we have already noted the danger of spiritual lethargy. That would be when repugnance towards prayer would arise and a retreat would be one method of dealing with the problem. Nevertheless, the practice seems to be meant to be undergone only once or twice in a person's lifetime.

Sharafuddin does not know why the number forty has been chosen, but he relates a story about Moses who attributed his talking to God Almighty to the fact that he had spent forty days alone with Him on Mount Sinai. The generosity of Moses is stressed. He turned aside from everything else in order to give himself entirely to God. He even turned aside from all eating, according to Sharafuddin : that is why his stomach remained light. The retreatant should not be interested in anything or anyone except God. The special quality of such a retreat is the remembrance of God Almighty Himself. Sharafuddin is certain that God will be most generous towards such a person. Yet this presupposes a fidelity to the requisite condi-

tions of sincerity during the retreat itself. This means, in the main, absolute fidelity to one's aim of giving oneself over completely to seeking God. So convinced is Sharafuddin of the truth of the tradition, "Springs of wisdom will appear on the tongue of anyone who sets aside forty dawns for the Lord," that he says that, if this does not happen, the retreatant must have been negligent—i.e. really been in quest of something other than God.

He is well aware that some people mistakenly seek spiritual experiences in such a retreat. They do this because they hear about such things in the lives of the great Sufis. (402) Their aim is crooked from the very beginning, and are thus incapable of 'hitting the target'. Not only this, but such things, if manifested to such a person, would draw him even further away from God and only serve to increase his pride and foolishness. He describes the fall of such a person, step by step, ending up by saying that he becomes a complete heretic. This is in harmony with what he has already said about miracles where he pointed out that they could lead a man away from God if he allowed himself to pay any attention to them. He harks back again to the purpose of any spiritual experience—the deepening of a person's faith, thus enabling him to perceive and deal with anything which is not consonant with that faith. He also remarks that some righteous people do not have remarkable spiritual experiences, yet this should not be a cause for criticizing them. They are open to criticism only if they turn aside from steadfastness. (403)

Hence, mystical experiences are not all that important. In fact, of themselves they have no importance. They are of significance only is so far as they are a sign of God's activity and actually deepen a person's faith, and this deepening of faith is something that will become observable by others, for it produces steadfastness and laudable behaviour. The closer anyone draws—or better, is drawn—to God, the more beneficial and inspiring his life becomes for others. This is the criterion that has to be applied to those who claim to be holy men, not a credulous acceptance of mystical claims or miraculous display. Such is the clear attitude of Sharafuddin Maneri who

had no time for bogus holy men who, he tells us elsewhere, can do much harm to tbe genuine spiritual lives of the people.

He has one "parting shot" at such people who "are so contemptible and resourceless that if anyone does not refer to their greatness in any public utterance or, in private, dares breathe even a word of criticism concerning them, then they will make of him a life-long enemy...If such foolish people were in fact perfect men, they would not in the least be troubled by such-like things." (404) He wisely advises us to be careful of people who are touchy about their reputation for holiness.

Sharafuddin has obviously suffered at the hands of such people. It scarcely needs to be added that he can write so unerringly about such a tricky affair as a forty-day retreat only on the basis of personal experience.

Listening to Songs

Another practice recommended by Sharafuddin was the controversial sessions where people would gather together to listen to Persian verses sung by professional singers. He himself must have been deeply moved by some of the sessions he attended while in Delhi. Such sessions became a regular feature of his own hospice in Bihar. Letter 93 is devoted to this practice. His opening paragraph makes two important affirmations, each by means of apposite imagery. He says that hearts and minds are filled with precious meaning. Listening to songs brings these secrets of the heart out into the open, just as striking brings forth the fire which was previously hidden in the stone and iron. If it were not for the practice of listening to songs, all of these would remain hidden. Without the catalyst, no reaction is possible. Yet all the necessary materials have to be there, in one's heart, otherwise listening cannot play the role of a catalyst, for nothing can be educed from the heart if it is not already present there. In fact, Sharafuddin presupposes that there is much within a person's heart—love of God and a yearning to see Him. Listening to songs stimulates and strengthens love and yearning by bringing them out into the open.

It is clear that such sessions are meant for people with holy desires, but not for one and all. This is expressed clearly later on when it is stipulated that participants should be endowed with discrimination, and be people who practişe austerities. (392) Some are explicitly excluded. For example, anyone who is infatuated with a person upon whom it is unlawful for him to look should not participate in such gatherings, for he will be reminded of his infatuation, not stimulated to love of God, (387).

Sharafuddin asserts that, for some, it would in fact be a loss if they were not to listen to songs, for listening releases the fire within their breasts which would have otherwise remained hidden. Thus, when it reaches the stage of listening to the Lord himself, it becomes something really wonderful. Sharafuddin is caried away, most probably by many wonderful memories. It would not be fanciful to read an autobiographical note in the exclamation that a person's whole essence is transformed therein. (383)

We get a glimpse of how his mind and heart were affected by studying a verse he quotes and then explains :

I said, "I shall count the ring of tresses upon her head
And thus remove all ignorance about her."

She laughed at me and, twisting sharply her billow of tresses
Reduced to confusion all my careful calculations !

"This should be taken to mean that, if anybody wishes, by means of his own powers, to understand even the tip of the hair of the wonders of the divinity, he will fall into such confusion that all his counting will be incorrect, and all his intellectual efforts utterly confounded." (383)

There is one couplet which, together with its explanation, touches intimately the central contention of this work :

If you measure out two thousand cups of wine,
How can you relish it, unless you first taste it ?

"It is understood to mean that religious matters cannot be correctly appreciated by hearing and by knowledge alone, but

only by tasting them. If you speak a great deal about love, ardent desire, austerity, fear of God and so on, and even compose books about them, there will be no profit at all until you yourself are changed by the particular virtue you extol." (384) From remarks we find in the accounts of Sharafuddin's discourses it is clear that he was an adept at discerning the source of what was composed in books. His own interest was simply to help and encourage people to tread the Way to God. It is more painful than helpful for an intelligent and sensitive person to have to listen to people talk about a virtue when he or she perceives that the speaker has nothing more to offer than words. There is a danger that the revulsion felt at such a performance might rebound against the spiritual realities themselves, resulting in either an attitude of apathy or distaste. On the other hand, any word spoken with the unction of personal experience carries with it an extraordinary power to change others, precisely as Sharafuddin has said. His very own words possess this healing and soothing unction. This fact is still further support for their source—a heart transformed by divine grace !

This practice of listening to songs was also dealt with in the third chaper of this work, where we saw that Sharafuddin's personal enthusiasm for doing so had begun to wane, for he scarcely needed this particular catalyst any more. In the present letter he lists some qualifications about the practice. He insists on a number of rules which he spells out in detail in the course of the letter. He opposes both those who would ban all songs, and those who advocate a freedom which bordered on licence.

Begging

Begging and the abandonment of work both figure prominently in Sufi literature and are highly praised as exercises which proclaim and foster a pilgrim's trust in God. Hence it is important to ascertain what Sharafuddin thinks of the practice. In general, he does not favour it. As far as possible, it is better not to beg. The reason for this judgement is that many allurements and dangers can find their way into this practice. (287) He gives an explicit warning that a person is not to dis-

play his piety in order to acquire things by means of it. Even if a person has to beg, it should be only for a short while. It should not become a way of life. (288)

His preference, along with his reasons for it, is clear. Nevertheless, he maintains that begging can, for a while, be profitable for a pilgrim, so long as he observes carefully the exegencies of the situation. In other words, there should be a good reason for taking to begging, and that for a short time only. He lists three reasons, according to the sheikhs, for resorting to begging. The first is to obtain freedom of heart, while the second is that it is a good form of asceticism.

These two reasons are straight-forward enough, but the third is very curious and deserves being quoted in full. "The third is that begging helps people realize that everything belongs to Him. They see all creatures as His representatives. They ask His representative for whatever is needed for the good of their souls. They tell him what they have to say about themselves. It is up to the discernment and witnessing of the slave to know when he should petition the representative to fulfil his needs. This is better service and submission, and more fitting than approaching his Lord directly. Their begging is a sign of His presence, and an acknowledgement of God, not of His absence or of a turning away from Him." (288) Sharafuddin is saying that a person endowed with discernment who has 'witnessed' (God, of course), can find Him in another human being. It is God who gives to them whenever they receive something from another. In approaching men, they are approaching God, not turning away from Him. Notice also that they are asking for "whatever is needed for the good of their souls." It seems as though Sharafuddin actually has the spiritual guide in mind rather than some beneficent rich man.

This whole thrust of finding God in His creatures bears us to the pinnacle of love, the great unifier. For Sharafuddin, God himself is all of it—the entire creation is of God, and He can be found and loved therein. (244-5) This sort of begging is more an expression of loving confidence in God than anything else. It also obviates the danger of the type of presumption

condemned by Sharafuddin when he quotes this message for a Sufi who was wholly given over to trusting in God. He says he should be careful not to put God to the test for the sake of a couple of pieces of bread. When he is hungry, he should beg something to eat. Even trust in God should not be outlandish! (287) Having said this, Sharafuddin still knows of some who are looked after perfectly well by the Lord himself. They have no anxiety about their needs, relying wholly upon the Lord. It goes without saying that this describes his own situation, but his dedicated service to others has also to be kept in mind.

Making no Claims

It is very striking that, whenever Sharafuddin refers to himself, it is invariably in terms of deprecation. His normal practice is to include himself in a group, such as the 'luckless ones', who lament and complain because of their ill-fortune. Behind all such expressions is the conviction voiced in letter eighty-five, "Liberation from One's Carnal Soul." He says that anyone who thinks in his heart that there is at least somebody in the world who is worse than he, is still proud. (348) He insists that genuine Sufis make no claims, no matter what favours they have been granted.

Only proud men boast about their mystical experiences. Sharafuddin knows, in the very depths of his being, that all mystical favours are due to His grace, not to his own efforts. He voices this conviction on innumerable occasions. Face to face with God, so to say, he is so overwhelmed by His divine graciousness that he considers himself as nothing, and what claims can 'nothing' make ? Those devoid of such profoundly humbling experiences cannot efface themselves before the wonder and graciousness of God but are caught up in petty human comparisons the superficiality of which modern psychology is revealing ever more clearly.

In letter 52. "Speech and Behaviour", this attitude is illustrated for us. Anyone who sees a Muslim on the road should give way to him, just as the protected ones (Jews etc.) do for the Muslims. (209) This self-abasement is not, however. the

final word, for he adds that the fruit of such an attitude is that a crown of honour will be placed upon the person's head. This very 'sight' of oneself presupposes an insight gained by God's grace, not a tactical manoeuvre in the spiritual life. Indeed, if a person were to bemean himself in some artificial way, claiming a humility that was not genuine, he would deserve the scorn poured out upon Uriah Heep! It would be worse still if he pretended to be humble in order to have a crown of honour placed upon his head. Being genuinely humble, or even desiring to be, is poles apart from any such humbug.

As indicated, the obverse side of the coin of humility is an absence of making claims. Sharafuddin has many images which portray how ridiculous it is for man to make claims. Any preoccupation about claims only serves to rivet our attention upon ourselves and thus constitutes an obstacle to knowing God intimately.

In the very next letter, "Lights," there is a delightful illustration of the need to keep our humble origins ever in mind: "A peocock realizes what it is when, having gazed admiringly at its plumage and taken delight in the special beauty of each of its feathers, its glance comes to rest upon its feet." (58) When talking about "Union with God" he warns us that such work is scarcely compatible with seeking any form of lording it over others. (67) He illustrates his contention by referring to Adam who came to heaven, looked around and could not bear the weight of the heavenly crown. He was interested only in love, and bade adieu to the eight heavens. (67) The implication is that a descendant of Adam can scarcely hope to foster union with God if he embraces the very things his father had so explicitly rejected! A very subtle example of the teaching to eschew all claims is found in "The Quest of the Way" where there is a description of a man of great holiness. He was in danger of priding himself on his long years of submission. He had to abandon all such thoughts in order to escape from an astonishment that was tinged with pride. (94) We instinctively feel that Sharafuddin had himself experienced such an astonishment for him to be able to make an observation like this.

Writing about "The Perfect Formula" he briefly exhorts Qazi Shamsuddin not to bind anything to himself. (155) In other words, we are not to look for anything to cling to and make a basis for any claim. We are meant to stand erect and alone, binding ourselves solely to God.

The letter on "Mystical Knowledge" contains a description of a particular group which reveals the realization—in Sharafuddin himself, of course—of the ideal just mentioned. He writes: "Although this group has more knowledge of God, still they consider themselves as being more in need, mere beginners, and even ordinary. Their divine knowledge is free of claims and bragging. They are not exalted by an increase of knowledge. They do not pride themselves on their exercise of supernatural power. The soul of such a mystic is so filled with such an abundance of uninterrupted favour and divine liberality at the greatness and beauty of the Known One, in the secrecy of intimate knowledge, that it cannot be expressed in writing." (179-80) There is a serene matter-of-factness about these lines which only serve to heighten the sublimity of the experience which inspired them.

When "Encouraging the Disciple" Sharafuddin indicates what God can do to a man who, in fact, does not consider that he has anything at all to boast about. Although a novice might pride himself on his spiritual attainments, a mystic is careful not to put too much stress on his spritual insights, for that could prove to be an obstacle along the Way. God is the one who enables a spiritual guide to distinguish one who seeks reality from one who pursues vanity; mystical knowledge from ignorance, and the behaviour of genuinely learned men from that of the ignorant. He also bestows the ability to recognize everything related to the knowledge of God that will help people make progress along the Way. (220) Here it is Sharafuddin, the spiritual guide, who is speaking, indicating to us some of the talents bestowed upon himself in order to perform his task of directing people towards God with that unerring skill for which he became justly famous.

Contentment

Contentment is one of the signs of the sincere traveller. Sharafuddin says that he is happy, even when he does not get what he wants. (93) This type of happiness is an indication that he has been freed from all bonds. In other words, though he needs various things and is happy to get them, the fact than he remains contented, even if he does not get what he wants indicates that the real source of his happiness lies beyond the thing in question, no matter what it may be. Hence the degree of contentment with which a person faces up to disappointment is a touchstone indicating the real source of his or her contentment. This deep contentment arises when a person's faith attains Reality. (171)

Yet another expression of this contentment is when a person prefers to converse with God rather than with men; to gaze upon God rather than men; and to devote himself to God rather than be engaged in serving men. Only one loss can disturb him—that of God Almighty himself (189). This confirms what we have already seen – the divine origin of such contentment. The reference to preferences is important, for there can be a false contentment which can in fact refer to negligence. In view of these preferences—clearly those espoused by Sharafuddin—we can appreciate just that little bit more the sacrifice it cost him to devote himself to people and their needs when his own preference was to be with his Beloved. Here is a delightful story which dividly illustrates how genuine contentment with the Beloved precludes all hankering after anybody else. It was related by Isami. "I saw a really beauitiful girl, and lost my heart to her. I said to her : 'My whole being is completely taken up with you'. She said : 'If this is true, I too will lavish myself entirely upon you. Yet I must tell you that I have a sister. Once you see her face you will completely forget me.' I said, 'Where is she ?' 'Right behind you !' I turned and looked behind me. She sprang up and hit me on the back, saying : 'O deceiver, if your being had been completely engrossed in mine, how could you possibly look at another ?' (279-80)

Coping with Fear

Sharafuddin's method of coping with fear is implied in the fact that fear is invariably treated along with hope. In the final analysis, his hope and fear are not so much attitudes of mind as states of soul, or the basic dispositions of a person's heart with palpable emotional overtones. They emanate from the core of one's being, not from one's head. It should be noticed immediately that we are not dealing with mere velleities when discussing hope (in the strain of "I hope it doesn't rain tommorrow"). Neither are we talking about the normal, healthy fear that would grip us if we were wandering along a jungle path and a huge elephant suddenly blocked our way. Our discussion is at a far deeper level.

Sharafuddin tells us that hope and fear are like the sun and shade. Both are needed if any fruit is to ripen. It is by experiencing both that a person grows to full maturity of spirit. (319) Sharafuddin is interested in man's growth in spirit and progress along the Way as a result of this two-fold form of divine activity. In his thinking, this is best summarised as a growth of heart or—using the cherished mirror image—a person's heart, by means of the activity of both the divine favour and wrath, becomes purified, polished, and therefore more capable of receiving and reflecting the divine illumination.

The comparison used highlights another important aspect of growth—it takes time. This is clearly indicated by the reality of the process of ripening. His thinking is that hope and fear, when judiciously mixed, are very beneficial for progress in the spiritual life. Put in other words, we could say that God from time to time, and in different ways, lifts a person up, i.e. grants him consolation. Buoyed up by this divine grace, his heart expands and he finds it easy to do good and reject evil. This results in much progress along the Way. Yet, there is a danger connected with this ease and facility in doing good, for it could lead to spiritual pride. A person might begin to think that he is naturally able to do great good, that it all flows from himself and not from the divine favour. That is why, sometimes, 'abandonment' occurs. God, as it were, leaves him on

his own. He no longer showers His divine favours upon him. In this way he finds out how difficult it is for him, by himself, to accomplish even the smallest amount of good. This process produces a growth in self-knowledge and keeps a person from falling into pride.

Thus it is that God, by judiciously blending consolation and desolation, helps a person to grow. This is also an expression of his deep and abiding faith in God's inscrutable providence ordained for his ultimate good. Uninterrupted confidence could bring indolence and laziness in its train. On the other hand, unrelieved fear could lead to dejection. Both hope and fear, in equal proportions, are needed for effective therapy. One element of this teaching seems to be at variance with the writer's explanation above, namely the idea of equal proportions. Indeed, Sharafuddin develops precisely this aspect in the image of the wings of a bird, pointing out that it is well balanced only if its wings are equal. The idea should not be pushed too far, for he also points out that fear is more helpful when someone is strong and completely correct in his belief and practice, while hope is needed when a person is sick and weak, especially when he is gripped by the pangs of death. (411).

He is thus quite open to the suggestion that one of the two should predominate, according to a person's situation. We notice, however, that the idea behind this assertion is the good of the person involved. This means that God is concerned with fostering well-being, as was asserted, by bestowing as much divine favour as a person is capable of. This is borne out by a comparative study of the references to hope and fear in the letters. Wise and experienced guide that he was, Sharafuddin knew that his disciples were more in need of encouragement than of stern warnings.

Sharafuddin's classic text on the topic is the following: "His hope should be such that if all the sin and opposition of the entire world were his alone, and a voice were to come and say, 'There is only one person who will go to heaven,' he would know that he was that person ! On the other hand, his fear should be such that if all the obedience and devotion of all the

worlds belonged to him alone, and a voice were to come and say, 'Only one person will go hell,' he would know that he was that person!" (320) Clearly, when one's gaze is fixed on God, all is hope, whereas one always has to remain fearful of one's human weakness. This quotation also makes an implicit distinction between struggling, falling disciples and accomplished masters of the Way. Their fare is different, because they need different types of nourishment in order to grow ever stronger in spirit.

A Metaphysical Backdrop

There is one theme, one truth, which Sharafuddin returns to time and again as a source of great joy and encourggement for the traveller, namely, the eternal covenant which exists between God and the entire human race. "Am I not your Lord ?" God asks "the seed" of the children of Adam before their actual creation. He made them testify of themselves, "Yes, we bear witness." (Q. 7, 172). The verse finishes off with the explanation of this covenant. It is meant to prevent the people from being able to claim, on the Day of Resurrection, that they were unaware of the fact of God's lordship and of their utter dependence on Him. This Quranic verse is at the very heart of Sharafuddin's conception of the Way to God. From all eternity God has called upon all men and women to acknowledge that He is their Lord, and this fact is to be made manifest to the whole of mankind on the Day of Resurrection. Sharafuddin rejoices at this covenant between God and men. It forms the background against which he understands how this Lord calls some, in a very special way, to himself, even during this life, before the general manifestation on the Day of Resurrection.

All mystical experiences and revelations are meant to be seen and understood in this context. This is why, as we have already seen, the beatific vision is quite different from any enlightenment that can be received during this life. It also renders intelligible Sharafuddin's cautious attitude towards mystical revelations and miraculous power as evinced, for example, in his treatment of the forty-day retreat. If a person

is granted such things, well and good, but their purpose is never that they may be enjoyed purely for their own sake. Not at all ! They are meant to deepen a person's faith, to make the final Reality more meaningful for him, for the present situation is one that will be blown away like straw in the wind. A steadfast looking ahead is demanded, not a turning aside to taste the ephemeral delights of this world. The terms of the covenant also clearly underscore the fact that everything flows from the divine initiative. This both serves to emphasize Sharafuddin's constant teaching about the gratuity of divine grace and to place it fairly and squarely in a metaphysical setting.

The Arabic word used for Lord is 'rabb' and it is interesting to notice that the Urdu translation generally prefers 'parwardigār', which means a person who is engaged in looking after, educating or bringing up another, providing him with all that he needs. The word 'Lord' has been chosen for the English translation because of its long history and multi-layered overtones. It is, in this instance, a beneficent Lord who is meant, not one tainted with tyranny. It is evident from Sharafuddin's usage of this backdrop that it meant very much to him, always bringing great consolation to his heart.

In "Union with God" Sharafuddin draws our attention to what occurred at the very beginning. In the very beginnidg, the first covenant was "Am I not your Lord ?" He immediately contrasts man's humble origins with his exalted destiny. A lump of clay has been raised to a spiritual plane and experienced the Leaven of everything leavened. (65) He then gives us a sentence which could easily be taken as the leitmotif of his own life. "One gulp of 'Am I not' gives so much pleasure to his palate that it can never be erased through his entire lifetime." (66) He himself had indeed quaffed the heady wine of "Am I not" and had never afterwards lost the enjoyment of tasting it. Indeed, his life consisted of that delight ! We may mention that this is in confirmation of what he had written about his inability, even for a moment, to abandon that wine. He bursts into song :

Your lovers have been intoxicated by "Am I not" !
They have come, their heads swimming with "Am I not" !

As they imbibe this wine and drink of its fragrance,

"Am I not,' turns them into devotees of wine. (66).

There can be no gainsaying the fact of the sheer delight he experienced while imbibing the wine of "Am I not".

He highlights the teaching that it is all God's work, for did He not say to a handful of dust, "Am I not your Lord ?" He then describes what happens to those "submissive ones" who listen carefully to this divine interrogation. They are swept up into the rapture of divine union, together with a certain repulsion, veiling and a hundred rebukes. Every moment is devoted to silent converse with God, yet grief and anger still have their place. (92) This last remark is, as it were, a seal of the authenticity of what precedes it, for it is a stark expression of the paradox of the mystic's life. The pain involved is graphically expressed in these words : "All the time the Beloved says, 'Stay away, lest you be destroyed,' but they say, 'we made an offering of our lives on the very first day. We have destroyed ourselves on the very first day. It would be better to die than to have to live without you. If we had to live without You, we would turn our faces towards nothingness." (248)

Alone—or with Others ?

A crucial decision for a generous seeker is to discern whether he should carry out his endeavour to pursue the Way manfully by retiring into solitude and seeking an uninterrupted communion with God; or to associate with a group and submit himself to guidance and service. In fourteenth-century Bihar this would have been a serious decision to make in view of the tremendous pull exerted by the example of the solitary life of the Hindu ascetics and the remembrance of the early solitude of both the Buddha and even of Sharafuddin himself, when he retired into the forest and his cave. Added to this would be the pull of the obvious attraction the Prophet had felt for his brief excursions into solitude and the marvellous fruit of this communing with God on the lonely hillside-

the beginnings of divine revelation itself ! There was also the example of such eminent people as Imam Ghazzali who retired into solitude for a number of years. On the other hand, there was the whole set-up of the different groups of Sufis who gathered around a Sheikh in his hospice and derived immense benefit from the manifold aspects of such association. This was, after all, the common practice of the Sufis. Sharafuddin devotes one letter to companionship, and six to solitude and separation from the world. We shall see what he says in them.

Letter 70 begins unambiguously in favour of the manifold benefits of companionship, highlighting how effective it can be in moulding a person's temperament and habits. (289) Even Sheikhs seek the benefits of associating together and command their disciples to do the same. Obviously, the fruit of "overcoming one's created temperament" is a great goal for the Sufis to aim at. Sharafuddin claims that it can be attained by associating with a group of dedicated men.

Not content with delivering this weighty injunction, he proceeds to give his reasons for it. He says that a person assimilates, often unconsciously, the ways of behaving of the group, and their virtues begin to flourish in him and gain influence over any other intention. He proceeds to illustrate and further explain his teaching. It is quite true to say that the more closely a person is associated with a particular group the more he becomes influenced by it, yet the presupposition in the whole argument is that the group is an exemplary one. Such groups abound in pious legends but are a rarity in the flesh. Still, some such groups did exist in Sharafuddin's time—his own, for example—and he urges the aspirant to join one. He would have the aspirant consider only his spiritual welfare, not any possible material advantages that might accure to him. He should join a group for the sake of God, not for any personal desire, of no matter what sort. (290).

Sharafuddin goes so far as to say that being alone could be destructive for a disciple, and quotes a tradition to this effect : "Satan dwells with the man who is by himself, but he remains

far away if there are two together." He also says : "Where three of you are gathered together in an attempt to fathom the divine mystery, God himself makes the fourth." In fact, living alone is highly dangerous for a disciple. This final remark represents his considered opinion on the matter. He illustrates it by means of a story of a disciple who retired into solitude and fell into Satanic delusions.

He paints a picture of what it means to be a worthy member of an exemplary group, highlighting communal living, sharing of goods, hard work, congenial companionship, and the religious support that can be found therein. These ideals were very much alive in the heart of Sharafuddin.

In view of all this lavish praise for companionship, it will be interesting to see what he has to say about solitude. It is like a bazaar for seekers, and like a New Year celebration. (246) He has chosen extremely paradoxical images to convey his attitude towards separation and solitude, especially for a person who is acquainted with the congested yet joyful bazaars of India, not to mention the gaiety that accompanies New Year celebrations. In other words, separation and solitude are meant to be really enjoyable experiences for seekers and righteous disciples.

There is also inner seclusion, which means cleansing one's heart of all thoughts except those about God. It is apparent that all that is said about seclusion can be summed up as a very deep personal detachment from creatures and a firm attachment to God. External seclusion is meant to foster such attitudes of soul and must be judged on its results. If sought simply for its own sake, seclusion is a delusion.

Sharafuddin himself explains that separation is from all relationships and from all creatures, while solitude is from oneself. Nothing except God remains in the heart. All human associations are out. One must not get engrossed with anyone or in anything. (249) Separation is also 'from all relations', while solitude is 'from oneself' and we immediately realize that such conditions do not depend on physical seclusion in itself, but are found in the core of a person's being. The would—

be solitary is also enjoined not to get engrossed in affairs, or with people. Put in blunt language, Sharafuddin is saying that no creature, relationship or occupation, not even our relationship to ourselves –in the sense of preoccupation with ourselves— should so engross our attention as to deprive us of finding rest in God. He also describes this separation from another angle, saying that the possession of both worlds would not make him happy without his Friend : whereas if he had only his Friend, he would experience no unhappiness at all. Nothing can be compared to the Friend !

Sharafuddin speaks boldly, asserting that a person's worship does not become correct until he has abandoned the world. We might be excused for immediately thinking in terms of waving good-bye to kith and kin, home and fields, and heading off into the jungle. He is, however, on a much deeper level, for he points out that, while a person might appear to be totally engrossed in the search for God, he can, in point of fact, be hankering after that worship itself. (309) This criticism can be applied to people in all possible external circumstances. Consequently, there is no absolute injunction to abandonment of the world, even though a clear preference for it is expressed. In practical language, Sharafuddin's point is that people who are very busy with the affairs of this world tend to have little time for those of the next. We might call it an empirical observation in contrast to an absolute statement.

He also talks about a withdrawal "which is within the power of the slave ..and consists of three things : 1) abandoning the quest for things he does not have in the world; 2) keeping at a distance whatever he has acquired from the world; and 3) the internal abandonment of the desire of the world." (309) What is of greatest interest for us is the ordered progression from an abandonment of the quest of things to that of even any desire for them. All of these steps can be put into practice by a person without, strictly speaking, abandoning his possessions, for it is the quest of things that brings trouble in its wake. Sharafuddin makes this clear by referring to Solomon who, though he possessed dominion and wealth, was detached from the world.

One can agree with the point he makes even if one has reservations about Solomon's spirit of detachment !

It someone does his best in this matter, "and removes all desire of possessions from his heart, he is then granted, by the grace and bounty of God, that type of detachment which is not within his own power. In other words, his heart grows cold towards the world. This, according to a number of the sages, is genuine detachment. The most difficult task in this whole matter is to expel the very desire of the world from one's heart. There are many who externally appear to have grown completely detached from the world but are inwardly enamoured of it. What is really important is that the desire of the world should go out of one's heart." (309) Such detachment is a grace of a high mystical order. In itself it has nothing to do with whether a man possesses much or little, lives at home or in the jungle. This is indirectly confirmed by Sharafuddin's description of the time when actual abandonment of the world is recommended. He paints a picture of an unholy age, and asserts that matters have not improved, but even further deteriorated. An argument based on "the wickedness of the age", however, is of little value, for "wicked ages" are always with us.

It is interesting to read what Sharafuddin says in "Separation from People," not for the theory so much as for the evident autobiographical flavour of the remarks. He says that a person who is not needed by people for religious assistance should separate himself from them. (396) With such thoughts in his mind he himself must have slipped off into the jungle of Bihia. Yet he is not thinking here of a compaletely isolated spot, for he advocates attendance at Friday prayer. (397) His sojourn in the cave in Rajgir readily comes to mind. He is obviously hard pressed to put forward a case for complete and utter seclusion from the Muslim community. His many qualifications would make little sense to a Hindu who determined to lead a life of seclusion. Sharafuddin goes on to speak unambiguously about the legitimate expectations of the community, and implies that

the very gifts lavished by God on somebody have a communitarian dimension that must be respected. A person who can help foster and deepen the faith of his fellow Muslims should remain among them in order to give them advice and instruction about the life to come. Sharafuddin had learned, the hard way, of the sublimity of "bringing comfort to hearts." (293)

6

Facing Dangers and Growing

A person who has been called to the Way and has manfully heeded this call and set out well provided with provisions for the journey would like to know something about the road ahead, as well as the dangers he is likely to encounter. This chapter gives an outline of the spiritual growth which can be hoped for as one makes progress along the Way, after pointing out some of the dangers that can be expected, under the following headings: "The Danger of False Ideas"; "The Danger of Fame"; "The Permanent Danger"; "Growth in Mystical knowledge"; "Growth in Love"; and finally "Consummation."

The Danger of False Ideas

A pilgrim should be aware of the fact that some dangers will confront him at the intellectual level in the form of false ideas. Letter seventeen deals with a false idea that can only be conceived by a man who is very far advanced in the spiritual life. Sharafuddin explains in detail the qualities of such a person and then describes the danger—the temptation to abandon the five daily prayers as being superfluous for such an advanced Sufi. (70)

Sharafuddin pronounces judgement immediately, asserting that such thoughts are a sure sign of the activity of Satan, who keeps an eye on advanced Sufis, hoping to catch them by means of their spiritual gifts. He clearly exposes the false idea here encountered, namely that there can come a stage when the Law does not need to be observed, for it has served its purpose of bringing a man close to God. The correct teaching is that no degree of closeness can, in any way, release a person from the obedience due to the Law.

Sometimes we are puzzled at what afterwards happens to some who have attained a very exalted rank of holiness. Sharafuddin maintains that they fell because they thought they had passed beyond the yoke of the Law. The saints know that this false idea is to be combated not by thinking about it but by absolute fidelity to the observance of the Law, even to the very hour of death.

The following letter takes up other false ideas. One is expressed thus. Seeing that God has no need of our worship, nor is He affected by our sin (73) why should we bother about the Law ? Sharafuddin has no time for such foolishness, for the Law does not enjoin things for the sake of God but because they are beneficial for men. He illustrates this by pointing out how stupid it would be for a sick man to refuse to take the medicine prescribed for him by a physician on the plea that it would not harm the physician if he did not follow his instructions.

Presumption is another false idea that has to be rejected. Some people rush beyond the bounds of the Law and then blithely put their trust in God's mercy, presuming on His compassion. (74) He informs us, however, that God punishes effences severely. His thinking is quite realistic. Many people endure physical privations even though, being all merciful, God could easily create food to meet their needs. In order to stay healthy people have to eat and drink, and sick people are not cured without treatment. In other words, God respects His own creation, as Sharafuddin clearly teaches. If He chooses, in His sovereign majesty and power, to act directly on some particular

occasion in order to help some troubled person, then that is His affair. Man cannot presume to order Him about but is, of course, always free to make humble intercession. His final thrust is lethal : any person who is foolish enough to take poison will certainly die, even if he trusts in God's mercy !

Sharafuddin moves on to another false idea held by a third group who engage in ascetical practices in order to be suddenly purified of all sexual desire, anger and everything else censured by the Law. With instant purification as their goal, they give themselves over to the assiduous practice of asceticism. They will, of course, fail, and then turn around and say that the Law has enjoined something which is impossible. The result is that they abandon all asceticism.

It is clearly a false idea to say that the Law has enjoined the complete extirpation of desires. What is enjoined is that they should be kept under control. This is sound ascetical theology. He adds a human dimension to this challenging topic of asceticism when he remarks that a person who has lost his sexual appetite should seek treatment to have it restored. Sharafuddin presents kudos for self-control, not for impotency.

The next false idea to be exposed is that of the fourth group who are caught up in the folly of their own self-esteem, claiming that all works are preordained from the very beginning. "Everything is decided while we are still in the wombs of our mothers, so why bother exerting ourselves ? How could it profit us ?" (75) This is a very good question. He devotes two letters to the topic. (nos. 76, 77) On the practical level, Sharafuddin does not tolerate any 'laissez faire' attitude. He goes on to affirm that there is an intimate connection between the means and the end. If felicity has been ordained for someone, so too have good works. This teaching may nourish our faith but it adds little to our understanding of man's freedom and subsequent activity with respect to the all-pervading providence of God. No satisfying answer to this question is spelled out in the pages of *The Hundred Letters*. We can, however, profit from a wider and deeper exploration of Sharafuddin's thinking on this matter, for his writing reveals his personal experience.

Probably his best treatment of the whole topic is the following paradoxical passage which serves to convey, rather than explain, his attitude. "If you have looked at yourself or at someone else, then it is said, 'If you have made anyone an associate, all your works will be burnt up.' And if you want to have a little profit in your heart, it is said: 'Undoubtedly at every moment a protector has been assigned to you.' If you desire any rank in your heart, it is said, 'He knows the hidden secrets of the heart.' If he flees and hides somewhere, it is said: 'There is no place he can escape to.' If he still flees, calamity befalls him, 'All have to return in His direction.' If he abandons everything and sits helplessly, he hears, 'I will show those who have striven for My sake My own Way.' If he tries to exert himself, he hears: 'He distributes His mercy to whomsoever He chooses.' If anyone despairs, it is said, 'Don't despair of God's mercy.' If, on becoming filled with hope, you grow fearless, it is said, 'Are those people protected from God's ordering?' And if he cries out, it is said, 'It can't he asked why He did such and such!' (pp 316-7)

This passage could evoke a cry of protest—man is just a pawn! Sharafuddin would not approve of this reaction. He would be happy, on the contrary, if it were to inspire someone to acknowledge God's surpassing greatness. For him, this is of supreme importance. He is content to offer us hope and inspiration, rather than be concerned with fully satisfying our intellectual curiosity, and the grounds for hope in the above passage, which certainly seems to make man a pawn, can be expressed thus: The One who does all this is merciful and compassionate!

We could possibly sum up his teaching by saying that in some mysterious way man's free-will is both affirmed as existing and yet subsumed by the divine will. Mystery, not contradiction, lies at the heart of his teaching.

The Danger of Fame

The passage exposing the false idea of a man's ever outgrowing the detailed observance of the Law also referred to

miraculous power. It was possessed by the man who fell. It is taken for granted that a very holy person usually possesses such powers. They lead to fame and this is when the whole situation becomes fraught with danger. The topic is discussed explicitly in the tenth letter.

It begins with an important doctrinal statement: the miracles of the saints are admissible, even if they sometimes seem to match prophetic miracles. (47) This statement refers to a distinction made between prophetic miracles and the miracles of the saints. The former are special, while the latter are 'ordinary'—if such a term is applicable! It is not the controversy itself, but the thinking that lies behind it which is of interest to us. The exemplar is the Prophet. If Almighty God wants a prophet to show what he is, he should do so by a prophetic miracle. The difficulty is that, if saints begin to work such miracles, they end up by laying claim to being prophets as well. For Sharafuddin, this is impossible, since truthfulness is a condition of sanctity. His view on the miracles of Muslim saints that they constitute the special miracle of the Prophet. Just as the Law remains in force in the Muslim community, so too should the proof of its authenticity. Thus the saints can be said to be an affirmation of the genuineness of Muhammad's gift of prophecy until the very Day of Resurrection. (48)

In this perspective, we can examine how the gift of the ability to work miracles, together with the fame attached to it, can become a danger. This happens when someone goes around claiming to be a miracle worker. He has thus sought something other than the Friend. This would put an end to sanctity, not prove its existence. (49) Anyone who prides himself on what he does becomes self-centered and ends up displaying arrogance towards others. Such a man has already succumbed to the danger inherent in the possession of such powers! On the other hand, a good man flees from miracles and is genuinely apprehensive about them, realising their potential danger. Sharafuddin is able to write with feeling on this topic for he had experienced the tremendous pull towards pride that accompanies this power—unless a person takes the steps he himself inculcates. Experienced Sufis know that a preoccupation with miracles

indicates satisfaction with what is not God. Later on, a withdrawal from God himself occurs.

Sharafuddin illustrates his contention with a delightful story: "An example of this would be when a mother wants her child to get away from her and send him outside she gives him some sweet to eat. If the child is intelligent, he prefers to cling to his mother's skirt; but if he is foolish, he takes the sweet, rejoices, and goes outside where he either falls into the water or under the feet of some passing animal. His attention is only on the sweet and not on how far from his mother he is. The foolish child took the sweet and left his mother; but if he had continued holding on to his mother's skirt, the sweet would still have been his." (49-50)

The Permanent Danger

Sharafuddin, along with the vast majority of spiritual writers, insists on asceticism, the struggle to control one's sensual nature and bring it under the sway of reason. Although he condemned as 'false' the idea that the pull of our nature could ever be completely overcome, he insists that it most certainly can and should be brought under control by a generous struggle with one's carnal soul. He tells us plainly that nobody who fails to subdue his desires and keep them under control is of any consequence. (405)

He deals with "Concupiscence" or "Inordinate Desire" in letter eighty-one. Although its exact nature might not be clear in his mind, still he is able to say that all bad behaviour stems from it. (330). He goes on to say that defective behaviour can be remedied by ascetism, just as sin can be removed by repentance. He enumerates examples of the sort of thing he is talking about: pride, envy, avarice, anger and other such-like things. Later in the letter he mentions that the carnal soul can be brought under control by austerities, but its essence remains. The aim should be to master it, not destroy it. The more we try to destroy it, the bigger and stronger it will grow.

In the following letter, devoted to "Inordinate Desire", he classifies it under two headings, the first of which interests us at

the moment, namely that of the desire of pleasure and sensuality. Those who follow this desire frequent taverns where more than wine was available. After giving some illustrations, he concludes by pointing out how the abandoning of one's inordinate desires ennobles a person, whereas giving in to them enslaves him. (336) In terms of behaviour, he would have the disciple pass his time, night and day, in opposing the pull of his carnal soul, which originates in the senses. (337) Prayer also has to be resorted to, for God has placed this carnal soul within man and is bound to help him gain mastery over it.

Sharafuddin would never, however, give his approval to some of the bizarre forms of austerities known to him, as the following story indicates : "Abu Ali Siyah said: 'One day, according to the sacred tradition, I was shaving my pubic hair. I said to myself: 'O Ali, this is the member which is the root of all lust, and has thrown you into so many calamities. Get rid of it, so that you might acquire release from its wickedness!" I heard a voice which said: 'O Ali, you are encrouching on My domain. One member is not of greater dignity than another in My estimation. If you yourself get rid of it, I can place in every hair of your body what I have placed in only one member." (337)

He elaborates the point elsewhere: "The form and mould which you see with limbs and joints contains no dangers. It is a mount which bears the burdens of the commands of religion..... it should not be troubled at all. If, however, it decides to wander off the road of religion, then rain the whip of self-struggle upon it, so that it might return to the road. The limit of the form is this: if someone pricks himself in one of his bodily members with the point of a needle and says, 'I am punishing my lower self,' it would be a sin in the eyes of God Almighty. This fault is a result of great ignorance but, in his foolishness, the ascetic thinks it is a wonderful work. One should be careful not to go beyond the limits prescribed by sound knowledge, for your mount is precious." (233).

Sharafuddin is convinced that an earnest effort to master one's carnal soul is a necessary precondition for divine manifestations. He is well aware that many Sufis who honestly

sought God in ascetical practices were granted divine manifestations. Clearly, in Sharafuddin's mind, self-struggle is not an end in itself : it opens the way to divine illuminations, and this is why it is important. A man simply cannot be filled with God as long as he is filled with himself. Over and over again—almost to the point of tedium, in fact--he drums home the same point. We have seen the more obvious, sense-connected carnal soul that has to be overcome. Let us now look further at the refinements introduced by Sharafuddin concerning the person who makes progress towards God to the degree that he recognized the ever subtler areas of selfishness that lie within him and, having repented of them, is enabled to proceed further along the Way.

While speaking about "The Perfect Formula" he says that a novice who has not managed to pass beyond the confines of his human nature has not yet attained union with God. (153) Here, it is his whole human nature that restricts his entrance into the divine world. Quite logically, he cannot effect this passage of himself, for it is precisely his whole nature that is obstructing him. Hence Sharafuddin is eminently consistent when he says that God has to be disclosed to the inner vision of the novice. Notice also that this inner vision must be something special, something quite obviovsly beyond man's physical vision and, indeed, beyond his natural intellectual vision as well.

While discussing "The Way to God" he affirms that everyone who stands by virtue of his own strength will fall. (205) Man, of himself, even if he strains every fibre of his being, simply cannot succeed in attaining God. In fact, he will fall into disgrace.

Knowledge is at the very pinnacle of human nature, and man has an insatiable quest for it. Sharafuddin points out that a scholar seeks salvation by means of what he knows. He picks up the scraps of knowledge others have left behind in books. A disciple, on the other hand, is for throwing it all away and pressing on. Knowledge acts as a veil and has to be laid aside so that he can be free to accept what God offers him. These two positions are completely contrary to each other. (210) Sharafuddin is again affirming that human qualities, even the

very highest, can become obstacles for man, if he wants to attain to the immediate knowledge of God himself, something quite beyond his own unaided intellectual powers.

Sharafuddin has another valuable hint about ascertaining how much a person's nature still has a hold over him. Notice that a beginner talks much about his spiritual experiences, whereas a proficient Sufi is reticent. He likens the former to a nightingale, forever singing, and the latter to a falcon, which has never sung a single note. The former costs a silver piece, while the latter costs a thousand gold coins ! (220) For the novice, every experience is new and has to be talked about. The proficient one, on the other hand, is deeply united to God and finds it very difficult to talk about it. And, even if he could find words that made sense to others, he would still prefer to remain reticent, being both abashed and astonished at the Lord's goodness to him. He wants us to be convinced that we have to fling from our backs the fine garments of our devilish egos, otherwise we will not be clothed with the jewel of religion. (237) Notice that we do the flinging, while it is God who does the clothing.

While Sharafuddin sings the praises of contentment, he has no time for self-satisfaction. He likens it to drowning in one's human nature, and this is real death for him, whereas the commonly accepted death is only apparent. Man's relationship to God, not that of his body to his soul, is what really counts in his eyes.

Growth in Mystical Knowledge

The preceding section dealt with the permanent struggle with self, under many different forms. It is the perennial task of the seeker. According to Sharafuddin, the moment a person is satisfied that he has struggled hard and long enough and can begin to rest on his laurels is precisely the moment when he will fall. He tells us that such a man's ego has simply been hibernating and will quickly turn upon him and bite and sting him like a snake or a scorpion. Presupposing that the struggle continues until a man's dying day—"Praise be to God ! Even

at this moment Satan wants me to waver in my profession of faith in divine unity" fell from his own dying lips – we can ask what the seeker hopes to gain from all this strenuous effort. It is all undertaken in order that the searching might itşelf become pure, and then God can show His face to the seeker. (273) Clearly, God is at work here, for the effects mentioned are those which Sharafuddin constantly asserts are beyond the efforts of man, being the fruit of divine grace.

Sharafuddin does not waver in asserting that this work is beyond man's puny intellect. It might seem that this represents an anti-intellectual bias. In fact, he assumes that the intellect has a very important role to play as the seeker advances towards his ultimate goal, but he is also convinced that a person cannot attain this goal through the use of his intellectual faculties alone.

Presupposing that a novice is completely faithful to all the canonical prayers and those prescribed for him by his guide, he also mentions two important intellectual activities: a careful examination of his conscience each evening, and the practice of reflecting meditatively on creation. The former practice has already been mentioned and clearly involves the use of a person's intellectual faculties of reflecting on data and making judgements which will provide guidance for future conduct. The second practice has a whole letter dedicated to it.

At the beginning of the letter he excludes meditation on God in Himself, proposing rather that a person should meditate on created beings, not on the divine essence. (242) This is because the object of thinking should be restricted and limited if this exercies is to be of some use, whereas the divine essence and attributes are free from all limitation. He is consistent when he says this, for it is only when God reveals himself to man's inner vision that He can be known in any direct way, and this is the result of grace, not of reasoning—even that done in a prayerful manner.

He proceeds to inform us that we should meditate on God's creation in order to recognize the various manifestations of newness and permanence therein. The purpose of such medita-

tion is to pass beyond creatures to a knowledge of the creator of everything. (243) By reflecting on creation, we can see how great the Creator must be from the quality of the work He has produced. Clearly, Sharafuddin has analogical knowledge in mind. He would distinguish it from mystical knowledge of God. This occurs when God somehow reveals or manifests himself to someone. This, however, is for the future. For the time being, he is praising reflective meditation.

He invites us to pass on to a thorough examination of ourselves, saying that the disciple should examine his own soul, heart and body, reviewing his whole life from the very time of his creation until his death. This is a call to reflect on man as man, but he does not stop there, for he should also contemplate his own way of living. He makes his mind clearer by saying further that he should also reflect on the injunctions of the Law and act according to them, so that along the Way he may not be cut off by either emptiness or praise, or by any other type of obstacle. He is being urged to get wise and not live in a fool's paradise. Sharafuddin insists that this is no easy task, but one that can be successfully accomplishcd by real men (and real women). This process of reflecting will lead to the treasure of insight. This is another way of putting the fruit of his own daily reflection—insight such as can never be found in books.

As a result of all this—hopefully—mystical knowledge will be granted, for this could not take place unless learning and interior knowledge had previously been acquired in the heart. (244) The study of books (learning) and reflection on life (interior knowledge) can be considered as training and preparing a person for mystical knowledge, for it convinces a sincere disciple more and more of his state of creaturely dependence on his Lord. It is this very conviction that can be subsumed, so to say, by God, who enables a person to experience, in a still more refined manner, this reality of utter and complete dependence upon Him. It is difficult to see how a man with an inner conviction of complete self-sufficiency could have a mystical experience of utter dependence on God. Only when tracks have been laid can a train appear on the scene. Put in another

way, how can a man hope to experience God's mercy and compassion towards him until he can share Sharafuddin's conviction that God will indeed accept his repentance. (21)

The disciple who is faithful to prayer, service, struggle with his ego, docility to his guide and prayerful reflection, and whose trust is gradually becoming more firmly rooted in God Himself, is ready to receive divine illumination. This happens when a person perceives that every action flows from one source, who is also the Sole Agent. (12) This is the third stage of belief mentioned in Sharafuddin's very first letter which he says should be given careful, detailed consideration. It seems to represent, for him, the first stage of a prayer which could properly be called mystical. He further describes this firm belief as being different from the faith of both common people and that of the learned, for it elevates the heart. It does not appear as a form of constriction. A mystic is one who, at this stage, sees creatures and somehow experiences their Creator, in the sense that he perceives that they all come from Him. Sharafuddin goes on to point out that this very discrimination, however, indicates that the state of complete unification has not yet been attained. His own use of the word mystic indicates that this is, for him, the beginnings of mystical prayer, as has been stated.

Even in higher flights of prayer, however, deception is possible. If a person grows proud on account of his mystical prayer then this indicates that he has really seen his own soul, not God. He is adoring that, not God. Wherever hypocrisy is found a person is actually adoring creatures, not God. (45) Sharafuddin affirms that the very core of man, his heart and soul, is something wonderful in itself. Indeed, as in a mirror, the divine qualities can somehow be reflected therein. Nevertheless, they also remain as a veil until such time as the divine light, described as "the stability and firm support of all beings" comes into view.

In another discussion on this topic Sharafuddin asserts that the soul has been adorned with the beauty of its own attributes. It sometimes happens that the essence of the soul becomes manifested and claims, 'I am Reality'. A person then

erroneously thinks that he is God himself. Without the assistance of divine grace and a mature spiritual guide he cannot avoid making these mistakes. (62)

His classic discussion of the topic is found in the same letter "Manifestation". He writes: "Let us consider the manifestation or illumination that proceeds from the soul itself. It has a tendency towards appearing novel. It does not have the power to do away with unruly tendencies completely although, at the time of illumination, a person is far from the pull of such factors. It does not, however, annihilate them, since this kind of manifestation is still a veiled one. Human inclinations are still very much present. In the instance of divine manifestation, however, one is no longer encumbered since, of necessity, the divine illumination results in the laying aside of the manner of acting of the soul, and all purely human tendencies are done away with. The manifestation of the soul brings a certain amount of peace to the heart, but does not cleanse it of impurities or liberate it from doubt and suspicion, nor is the bliss of complete knowing bestowed upon it. Divine illumination, on the other hand, is the very opposite of this. Also, from the illumination of the soul, pride and self-esteem make their appearance ; haughtiness and preoccupation with self increase ; the quest for God is harmed; fear of God and supplication grow less. Divine illumination, however, does away with all these. Instead of preoccupation with self, self-forgetfulness is found ; yearning for God and fervour in seeking Him both increase ; the thirst for God also increases, and a person really experiences himself as being a mirror of the essence and attributes of the exalted Friend." (62-3)

These are extraordinary words. They are all the more remarkable for the air of calm yet undoubted authority with which they are uttered. They proceed from a very wise and experienced guide indeed! Their basic teaching was learnt from personal experience without which their authoritative tone and accuracy would not have been possible. There is a certain universality about this seemingly most intimate and incommunicable of human experiences. This manifests a wisdom that was further nurtured by the experience of guiding others. No matter how

bright the illumination of the soul or how much momentary peace it brings to a person, the above-mentioned classes of 'fruits' clearly enable an experienced guide to discern what sort of illumination is at stake. As long as it proceeds from some created source, no matter how refined, it is 'incapable of producing the fruits attributed to divine illumination. God does not "take over" without a mystic's both being aware of it and consenting to it. Indeed, he then becomes utterly incapable of claiming anything for himself, so very much is he aware of God's activity within him. This statement is verified by referring to every single instance in the letters when Sharafuddin includes himself in any category ; it is always the "unfortunate" or "luckless ones" etc. His only claim is that he is in need of God !

Sharafuddin has provided us with a most useful tool for discerning when somebody has actually begun to experience mystical knowledge of God, as outlined in the third degree of faith in the first letter. The discerning guide is not overly impressed by words – they can be found in manuals and mouthed by clever young people. To be sure, he listens to what they have to say, but he is also on the alert for the 'fruits' that were described, for it is not so much by their words as by their fruits that "you shall know them."

We are now in a position to study what he has to say about the fourth stage in his first letter. "In the fourth stage, such a great abundance of the dazzling divine light is manifested to the pilgrim that every single existing particle that lies within his vision becomes concealed in the very lustre of that light, just as particles in the air are lost to sight on account of the brightness of the light emanating from the sun. This occurs not because the particles have ceased to exist, but rather, that they cannot be seen. On account of the intensity of the sunlight it is impossible that anything other than this concealment should occur. In the same way, it is not true that a person becomes God—for God is infinitely greater than any man—nor has the person really ceased to exist, for ceasing to exist is one thing, and becoming lost to view is quite another !" (13)

Sharafuddin is convinced that, without the ever-present help of God's grace and favour, as well as the assistance of a spiritual guide, no one can traverse this wilderness.

Sharafuddin is talking about a privileged form of human experience, granted only to great mystics. The experience itself is incommunicable. Nevertheless, many have attempted to give some faint idea of what it is like. At the stage of mystical experience under discussion it is clear that Sharafuddin is making two points: a person who has such an experience is taken entirely out of himself, he is completely swept up into God, and this entails a complete loss of any awareness of self. His second point is that this pertains to a quality, not to the very essence of the person; the former is changed—the most immediately noticeable change being that at the level of consciousness—while the latter remains, even though it may not seem to.

Sharafuddin's other remarks on the topic can and should be interpreted in view of this fundamental statement.

We owe it to him to take him at his word. In addition to urging the frequent perusal of his first letter describing the foundation of all stages, states, activities and ecstatic phenomena of all kinds, he says that it will help a person understand what Sufis have written on this topic. He is clearly and deliberately presenting us with a touchstone with which to test the spiritual writings of eminent men. He is, however, even more explicit, hinting delicately that his letter throws light on the lawfulness of certain verses dealing with divine unity, a matter fraught with deception, and one in which contradictions can arise.

Sharafuddin mentions that beyond these four stages is one known as 'losing consciousness of being lost in divine contemplation.' (14)

Growth in Love

If you were utterly in love with My beauty,
One word alone would suffice—if you were known here.
Clinging to self means 'you'—Me you cannot reach:
To come to Me you must forsake your self! (375)

This verse suggests a dimension beyond that of knowledge, no matter how profound, in the mystical experience. We can, as it were, sit back and watch what has been described up till this point. One can imagine the intellectual wonder and amazement, as well as the resultant self-forgetfulness. In other words, it seems more like an affair of the intellect rather than of a person's entire being. Platonic contemplation has a long history attached to it. In the above verse, however, man's will enters prominently into the picture.

Sharafuddin says, with much feeling, that lovers are so immersed in the love of their Friend that His absence makes them desolate. (44) Nothing can console them in this condition. Lovers understand such language. Again, there is great intensity in these words: "Everything about them, visible and hidden, entirely and in the very totality of their spiritual powers, becomes so absorbed in the Friend that nothing remains in them except Him." (44) He also talks about their sighs at not finding God being like a flame raging within them, while their hearts are consumed with everlasting anguish—an anguish born of the inevitable separation imposed by their human condition. (54) He also talks about a feeling of bliss which arises and reassures a person that what he is seeing is from God Almighty, not from any other source. (56) Bliss is something which is diffused throughout a person's entire being. It seizes us, so to say, from top to bottom. There is no question of its being in any way compartmentalized and confined to a person's intellect.

Sharafuddin teaches that the sign of the traveller is that he is happy even when he does not get what he wants. (93) This refers to his ordinary life, but it presupposes an experience of bliss which leaves a permanent impact on a person, enabling him to remain content, even in face of great disappointment. It does not mean that a person becomes incapable of being shocked or upset, but it does mean that no emotion can so take possession of a person's soul as to deprive him of this inner happiness. Buoyed up by his many experiences of loving union with God he finds it easy to accept what has happened, and even the pain associated with it, because it all originates ultimately from his Friend, his Beloved. It is not a question of

thinking about these past experiences during moments of shock, but rather of the ever deepening and transforming love which is fed by moments of bliss, such as the one mentioned above.

Sometimes people given over to piety try to imitate such behaviour, having read about it in the lives of holy people or in works of spirituality. They either try to make themselves insensitive to the pain and anguish that we all experience, or they try to suppress these feelings, either consciously or unconsciously. The first line of approach is completely inhuman, implying a sort of contraceptive approach to all human emotions, while the latter could be termed an abortion mentality. In either approach, any clinical psychologist who has had to deal with people acting in such a fashion will be able to tell of the havoc wrought.

Sharafuddin's own words, in the same letter, show that this interpretation is in accordance with his very own teaching and experience. When God takes possession of a person's heart, thoughts of wife, children, this world or the next no longer find a lodging-place there. Although his being is still in the world, his heart is with God. (94) It is God's love, not any human activity, that produces the peace, serenity and happiness of the genuine Sufi.

There is further evidence that, in Sharafuddin's mind, growth in love is a deeper dimension to mystical knowledge, for he says that mystical knowledge is the seed of love. (109) Love of God sprouts from the seed of mystical knowledge. Knowledge, even mystical, is not the last word in our journey towards God. He continues: "Everyone who would penetrate further into the world of mystical knowledge will be more inflamed by the fire of love and will receive great delight and preeminence from the face of the Beloved and from the sight of the Desired One. He is the Beloved of souls and the Desired of hearts! The souls of the lovers are melting in the fire of longing." (109) A further penetration into mystical knowledge produces these effects of love. The mystic has become a lover, totally inflamed and melting in the fire of longing, a longing for a union so intimate as to enable him to melt into God himself!

He also says that God "gave them consolation and taught them about His own love and bore witness to the reality of His love for them." (Q 5, 54) It should be remarked that Sharafuddin frequently quotes this verse—at least nine times in his *Hundred Leters*—"He loved them, and they loved Him." (Q 5,54) It should be remarked that Sharafuddin presumes that a genuine lover is, somehow or other, always preoccupied with his Beloved, even as he goes about his daily affairs. He gains much strength and comfort from this love. It would be unthinkable for him to behave in such a way as would bring even a breath of criticism against the Beloved or even against religion itself. No, the lives of lovers should clearly bear testimony to their love. It is by producing the fruits of love, not by laying claim to love, that a person can be known as a lover. Sharafuddin says clearly that anyone who claims that he loves does about the easiest thing in the world, but actual loving is difficult in the extreme. (188)

In this very same letter we read about another sign of God's love for someone—a certain shying away from anything other than Him. (187) This does not mean that the servant shuns creatures, but it does indicate an attitude of mind and heart which, at both one and the same time, produces a certain deep sense of reverence and love for them, but never, as it were, stops short at them, but flows onwards to their Creator.

Sharafuddin is convinced that difficulties lie in store for a lover, and these very difficulties constitute yet another sign of God's love. He himself quotes a saying to the effect that love for God, coupled with difficulties, indicates that God desires a person's purification. Notice that the motive attributed for God's sending difficulties is to purify a person. This idea is very familier in the writings of the mystics and others, and is often expressed in the image of pruning a vine in order that it may produce better quality fruit. He illustrates his contention by referring to the many difficulties Muhammad had to face.

Sharafuddin is absolutely convinced that a good man will have to suffer. In this fashion a lover becomes ever more purified, especially through the sufferings of unmerited criticism, sometimes becoming quite vitriolic in tone.

While it is true that we are entitled to our reservations every time someone claims to love God until such time as the person has been tested by signs and confirmed by indications and proofs, yet we have also to remember that one of the signs of perfect love is intimacy in prayer with the Beloved and perfect happiness in His presence. (188) In a sense, it is hard for a lover to leave his Beloved and go out and attend to his daily affairs, for this deprives him of the most perfect form of intimacy. Yet he knows that doing what the Beloved desires is even more important than being with Him all the time. Hence he will manfully shoulder the pain of separation and go out to do whatever he is called upon to do.

We are warned that we have to be continually affilicted with the pain of not finding, or filled with the joy of finding Him. There is no question, even for a moment, of resting on one's laurels. (329)

Sharafuddin reveals a little more of himself when he says that a person's love for God should be such that he never rests except in his Beloved, even if he is conversing with others. (189) Clearly, conversing with men contains, as it were, an element of uneasiness, of restlessness about it, for he would prefer to be with Him. Yet converse he does, willingly and happily, with full attention and great interest, for this is what the Beloved wants, and is himself somehow found therein.

The letter on "Genealogy" contains a very important contribution to this whole discussion, for it ends up with an indication of how the Beloved can be found in converse with men. It touches on love for creatures: "One point should be noted: loving something dependent in no way detracts from the perfection of love, as has been said:

> My love for Lailą makes me love the countryside of Nejd:
> Apart from my love for her, I would have no interest in it!
> One reaches the stage of loving one's enemies!
> Because they are closely united to God!
> The reproaches of men are welcome because of my love for You!

For those who rebuke me also recall Your love to mind!

This is not associating others in one's love, but constitutes some indications of one's love for one's Friend." (pp 273-4)

How can a lover be indifferent to what is precious to and loved by the Friend? This is unthinkable! It becomes equally precious to the lover. Tellingly, the verses refer to the lover's own enemies as coming within the ambit of his love "because they are closely united to God." He himself elaborates his meaning by agreeing wholeheartedly that a beloved should essentially be only one, but hastily adds that no harm is done if other things are loved because of their dependence on the real Beloved. This statement covers the entire creation, for every single creature is "dependent on the real Beloved". He continues: "If a man loves Almightly God, inevitably he will also love the prophets and his spiritual masters and teachers. It is also entirely reasonable that he will love all things associated with Him. The whole world is His masterpiece, His structure and His writing. Inevitably, He himself is all of it—if such a further determination can be made!" (274-5)

Hence, as already hinted at, association with men, for a genuine lover, actually puts him in contact with God himself, for each person is ' His masterpiece.' The genuine lover does not try to run away from anything or anyone for the simple reason that he finds his Beloved everywhere. This is not a gift that is granted to beginners, nor even to those who have begun to experience mystical knowledge. For the former, God is not yet the greatest reality that fills their lives, while the latter have a tendency to cling to their mystical states. Even they need further purification. Lovers, however, have been transformed and are so selflessly united to God that they no longer cling to Him in the form of intimate communion, though this, of course, remains the most important element in their lives. It is their love for Him which readily enables them to find Him in others. Some, who have not yet become real lovers, try to superimpose Him on people and look for, and think they find Him, in their own superimposed image. This is a denial that He really is in others. A certain woodenness characterizes the behaviour of such people, for they are always finding the same image of God

in others—their own! On the other hand, great freshness of outlook and easy empathy with others are signs that a person is really finding God in them.

Hence we find such people genuinely interested in others and affectionate in their behaviour towards them. At this juncture it is impossible not to think of Sharafuddin's touching signs of great affection for so many as he himself lay dying. There is something truly sublime about such behaviour, being a reflection of the divine love and concern itself, and providing irrefutable evidence that here indeed is a genuine lover.

Consummation

The last four letters deal with the end of man's journey. It scarcely needs to be said that lovers are heading towards eternal bliss. This is what God has created man for, otherwise He would not have greeted man with "Am I not your Lord?" in the very beginning. (207) This is an extremely important statement, for it is situated in the primordial covenant between God and all mankind, even before creation. It is clear statement of God's purpose in creating men, "to be gracious to them." Man can expect nothing but good from God, nothing but an abundant shower of grace. And even if man sins, God's mercy universal, for as Sharafuddin tells us, God's will to forgive extends to all. (413) This is precisely why Sharafuddin is so insistent that a man's basic attitude in life, no matter how sinful he might be, should be one of faith in God who is Merciful and Compassionate. All Sharafuddin's appeals would fall on deaf ears if his listeners lacked even basic faith, though they might be impressed by his sincerity and utter dediction to God. The following would be nonesense verse for people completely devoid of faith:

> Come back at last, for I have opened the door:
>
> I stand ready to forgive you the moment you repent! (413)

When talking about advanced mystics Sharafuddin expresses beautifully what is really his attitude towards his own end. He

says that all their hope is in God Almighty, no matter how advanced in virture they may be, while they still possess a realistic apprehension about their own innate weakness. (416) This is definitely his own personal attitude of ,mind, for the same idea crops up in many different forms throughout the letters and elsewhere.

We have already seen, in Part Two, that Sharafuddin holds that there is a distinction between any knowledge we can have of God in this life, and the vision of God that will be granted us in the next. He says the same thing in The *Hundred Letters*. This life is full of passionate love and longing, in the next, it will be all peace and enjoyment. (203) The complete gratuity of this divine gift is constantly asserted. For example, when we read that God will grant the vision tomorrow, He does not do so because of any affinity. Man cannnot be said to be worthy of this vision. (300) He tries to indicate why this is so: "There is no eye that has been fashioned to contemplate Him, or ear shaped to hear Him, or intellect capable of comprehending Him, or foot capable of finding its way to Him". (300) In the next letter, he points out that gifts are bestowed upon men in this world singly, whereas the Incomparable will be given in the next. (301) He maintains that a person will not see God as long ashe remains in space and time. (367) In his letter on Death he quotes a saying of the specially favoured ones: "There is really only one sorrow—that of being denied the vision of God! Every other sorrow, apart from that, is easy to bear, because it is not destined to last." (411)

In the final letter of the collection, 'Heaven', Sharafuddin sketches the joys and pleasures of paradise, but insists that there is more in store for those who have done well—the vision of God himself! (423) It is such a source of delight as to make anyone forget all the pleasures of paradise. Those granted this vision will be beside themselves with joy. No other pleasure will remain in them, even to the extent of the smallest particle.

Thus, for Sharafuddin what really constitutes heaven is the vision of God himself, a vision already glimpsed by His lovers

in this world, but 'through a glass, darkly,' and 'singly', as he himself remarked. While writing about death he had referred to the one unbearable sorrow—that of being denied the vision of God. "Hence it is that the prayer of all the sages is this : 'O Lord, do whatever You wish, but don't cut us off from this!' The secret is this:

The hearts of all are stirred
In expectation of seeing Your face!
Our bodies, out of fear of separation,
Cry out in the midst of pleasure and comfort.
Without Your beauty, flowers of desire
Turn to thorns in my hope-enkindled eyes!" (411)

It is in view of spending eternity with the Friend that Sharafuddin can tell us not to be afraid of dying for, after death, it is all "life filled with LIFE!" (375)

Epilogue

Nobody who reads *The Hundred Letters* attentively could doubt that Sharafuddin had been granted spiritual experiences of a very high order, such as find expression in the gradual development of an exquisitely refined sense of service to others. This it was that impelled him to lift the burden of travelling frequently to Rajgir from the shoulders of Nizamuddin Maula and his companions and place it upon his own. It also enabled him, most reluctantly, to accept a royal grant, as well as to say to Qazi Ashrafuddin's four-year-old son, "Permit me to be of service to you!"

Even before he wrote his *Letters* Sharafuddin's spiritual experiences were a widely acknowledged fact. In this setting, the *Letters* are, ultimately, the fruit of personal experience. Indeed, it is impossible to conceive how they could have been written unless they flowed from this experience. This fact has been highlighted by this present study. What has emerged is

the inner coherence of Sharafuddin's teaching. It gives a balanced and satisfying account of the spiritual life of man. It should also be remarked that any reader who cares to check the presentation of this teaching against the complete text of the *Letters* will find that no attempt has been made to omit any teaching which might militate against the picture of the Way here depicted. This evident coherence is further proof of the authenticity of the experience upon which it is based.

This is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that, although the *Letters* form a veritable treatise on the spiritual life, they are not so intellectually finely chiselled as to leave us with no verbal contradictions. On the contrary, although there is a basic, inherited framework underlying them, nevertheless the *Letters* themselves are more the outpourings of Sharafuddin's heart than a coldly analytical presentation of the spiritual life. They also abound in verbal exaggerations, sometimes to the point of contradiction. This can only be understood as the exaggeration of a born teacher who uses all his pedagogical gifts in order to catch and stimulate the attention of his readers. Colourful, metaphorical, even exaggerated language produces such an effect. The reader is left to resolve for himself the apparent contradictions. In so far as a person has made progress in the spiritual life, that will not prove difficult. The present exposition may also prove of assistance.

It scarcely seems necessary to point out what the reader must have already seen for himself or herself—the obvious connection between certain experiences in Sharafuddin's life and his teaching. It seems incumbent on the present writer, however, to present a few examples of such connections.

It was not because he was a failure in life that Sharafuddin turned his gaze towards the Way. In Sonargaon he had congenial friends, a marital companion, a son, a revered teacher, high contacts, and had acquired a deep and wide grasp of the Islamic religious sciences. A successful career lay open to him, but he turned his back on all this and set out in search of a guide. Failure cannot be classified as his reason for abandoning the world and seeking someone to guide him along the Way to God. His own explanation is that the origin of all goodness

is a certain uneasiness; this is how a lover is born. This uneasiness expressed his lack of contentment, his yearning for more. When it became unbearable, he set out to find someone who might guide him towards ways and means of assuaging this uneasiness by assisting him to draw ever closer to the very Source of all being.

Yet it was not his own calculations that led him to the man who could do this for him. Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi seems to have been about the last ranking spiritual guide he thought of seeing in Delhi. When he finally did meet him, however, he did not doubt for a minute that he was the guide for him—his whole being cried out, "This is the man for you!" Hence his serene conviction that a novice will be able to recognize the guide destined for him simply because God himself will come to his aid. Sharafuddin does not doubt for a moment that He actually will !

It was not any external sign, nor Najibuddin's intellectual ability or fame, that exterted such a powerful influence over him. It was the attraction he felt for Najibuddin, an attraction initially mingled with a sense of awe, which exerted such a transforming influence on him that he could write that a novice will come under the full influence of the guidance of his sheikh only when he falls conpletely in love with his beauty and saintliness. (32)

Probably his first forty-day retreat was under the loving guidance of Najibuddin. This, and further experience, enabled him to write so perceptively on the subject. His long and varied association with the practice of listening to songs led to a lengthy yet delicately nuanced letter on the topic. His years of solitude enabled him to write authoritatively on the topic in several of his letters, and the long, drawn-out struggle with his most formidable foe, his carnal soul, especially its ever more refined manifestations, produced a spate of penetrating letters on the whole topic of struggle with self. His service of others, beginning in Rajgir itself, made him realize, through its practical demands, just how evalted a form of divine worship it really is, and this realization resulted in three beautiful letters

on the topic. They reveal how his own service gradually grew to be based on love.

Nobody had to explain what riches lie in the practices of fasting, utter devotion to canonical prayer and the other injunctions of the Law: he observed them, experienced their benefits, and wrote inspiringly about them.

Begging was not, for him, a practice viewed from a distance. He experienced great want and privation, and was able to write with an air of authority on the topic, coming out clearly against begging as a permanent practice, yet making allowances for many spiritually profitable short-term exceptions.

Sharafuddin himse!f wrote : "If you speak a great deal about love, ardent desire, austerity, fear of God so on, and even compose books about them, there will be no profit at all until you yourself are changed by the particular virtue you extol." (384)

The reader who cares to read *The Hundred Letters*, wholly or in part, or who is content with the exposition of Sharafuddin's Way as found in this work, will be able to make a personal judgement of how greatly he had been transformed by his deep experience of God. It also needs to be pointed out that, while the writings of Sharafuddin—especially his *Letters*—have been studied down the ages, it is even more important to realize the impact he has had on the hearts of even the common Muslims of Bihar. This can be illustrated by an incident which occured a short while ago.

A simple young Muslim woman had come from her village to Patna to be with her mother for the second half of her pregnancy. Her mother lives in a mud hut close to the Ganga. The woman, however, had a miscarriage and become very ill. She was admitted, in an unconsious condition, in a local hospital. Her condition grew worse day by day, in spite of the care she received. Once she regained consciousness while some people were praying at her bedside. She tried to speak. When asked what she wanted, she replied that she would like to have some perfume to take to Makhdum Sahib. (i.e. to the tomb of Sharafuddin Maneri.) She promised to do so if she got well.

The other ladies then prayed to Makhdum Sahib to intercede on her behalf.

The sick lady recovered and, together with her husband, went to Sharafuddin's tomb in Bihar Sharif to make her presentation.

In this way Sharafuddin has not ceased the work which became, for him, the one beyond compare—that of bringing comfort to hearts !

Appendix A

On 8th November, 1353 A.D., Barani tells us, Firuz Shah began his march against Haji Ilyas, the ruler of Lakhnauti.[1] The army kept north of the Ganga, while there was a large flotilla on the river itself. The Rais of Kharosa and Gorakhpur submitted to Firuz Shah, as did the Rai of Tirhut.[2] Haji Ilyas and his troops were assembled on the eastern side of the Kosi river, not far from its junction with the Ganga. Firuz Shah had to lead his army far upstream in order to cross the Kosi.[3] Ilyas fled his capital to his fort at Ekdala, 23 miles to the north.[4] After peace was concluded, the Sultan returned via Tirhut, Zafarabad and Kara, near Allahabad, arriving in Delhi on 1st September, 1354, A.D.[5]

Two observations can be made : There is no mention, in any of the chronicles, of Firuz Shah's having crossed south of the Ganga. It is most unlikely that he would have done so for, on the eastward march he was continually receiving the personal homage of local rulers and, on the return journey, he seems to have been in a hurry to return to Delhi, keeping his army on the move, even during the monsoon period.

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1. R.C. Jauhri, *Firoz Tughluq*(Agra, 1968), p. 46.
2. *Idem.*, p. 47
3. *Idem.*, p. 48.
4. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, vol. 11, p. 107 (and footnote),
5. Jauhri, *Firoz Tughluq*, pp. 53-54.

The second expedition was a re-play of the first, except for the fact that he spent the monsoon of 1359 A.D. founding Jaunpur. He left Ekdala on 8th April, 1360 A.D., after peace had been established, and Ain ul-mulk Mahru informs us that Delhi received news of these events on 21st May, 1360 A.D.[6] Firuz Shah again stayed in Jaunpur during the monsoon season and orderd the march to Jainagar (Orissa) after the rains. The first move was to Kara, near Allahabad, where all the baggage and camp-followers were left, and an unencumbered body of troopers headed, via Bihar and Singhbum,[7] to Jainagar, reaching Cuttack and even the sea at Puri. Both Mahru and Yahya Sirhindi record that Firuz returned directly to Kara, picked up his baggage, and reached Delhi in Sha 'ban, 762 A.H. (June-July, 1361 A.D.)[8] having travelled via Sambalpur.[9] Saksena rightly rejects the statement of Afif, made on the authority of his father, who had accompanied the expendition, that the army had wandered about lost for six months.[10] Clearly, the return trip, through Sambalpur and modern Madhya Pradesh, had been a taxing one for the soldiers as they travelled through difficult and largely unknown, hilly terrain. The speed with which the army moved, both on the way to Orissa and on the return trip, is mentioned in the *Sīrat-i Fīrūz Shāhī* :

"The army travelled rapidly day and night, covering 20 miles per day."[11] Special arrangements for a swift return march are mentioned.[12] This unique work also makes it clear that it was on the March towards Orissa that Firuz Shah visited the town of Bihar : "In the days of spring, the auspicious standard arrived in the town of Bihar. From there he gave orders for marching in fast, successive stages."[13] We are also told, of the outward march from Kara, that "it was the cold, winter season" when it took place.[14]

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6. Jauhri, *Firoz Tughluq*, p. 61
7. *Idem.*, p. 63.
8. *Idem.*, p. 68.
9. *Idem.*,
10. Habib and Nizami, *The Delhi Sultanat*, p. 593.
11. 12, 13 & 14. *Sīrat-i-Fīrūz Shāhī* (English transl. typescript of S.H. (Askari). pp, 70, 88, 67, 49 respectively.

One of the collections of Sharafuddin's own discourses (Ṣafar), records the return of Zain Badar Arabi to Bihar town and his conversation with Sharafuddin, immediately on his arrival, on Saturday night, 2 January, 1361. He had been in Bengal for six and a half months and informed Sharafuddin of the hardships the people of Bengal had been faced with on account of the expedition of Firuz Shah the previous year (i.e. the one that ended on 8th April, 1360 A.D.) Obviously there was neither sign nor even hint of Firuz Shah's presence in Bihar, nor news that he was headed in that direction. His impending expedition was unknown to them. It has to be concluded that he visited Sharafuddin in Bihar town after this date. If we place it at the begining of February, this would tally with the observation of the *Sīrat* that he arrived there "in spring."[15] Firuz Shah would have visited Sharafuddin on this occasion, especially in view of his known propensity for visiting saintly personages, particularly when he was about to set out on some dangerouse enterprise. There is no proof that he visited him in 1354 A.D.

The visit itself is referred to in a very early work about Husamuddin Manikpuri (d. 1452 A.D.), compiled by Pir Imamuddin who refers to the Sultan's having visited Sharafuddin Maneri, saying his prayers behind him, and asking for his blessings upon his undertakings.[16] A fuller, more embellished account is found in a work of the seventeeth-century Shuttari saint of Jandaha, *Malfūz-i Ruknuddīn* :

> When sultan Firuz came to Bihar he first called upon Makhdum Ahmad Charmposh, who did not show the respect due to him. When he went to Shah Sharafuddin Ahmad, the Master gave him a proper sort of welcome. Sultan Firuz took the hand of the Master and indicated that he should precede him. Out of humility, the Master demurred. At last he succeeded in making Sultan Firuz Shah precede him. Sultan Firoz Shah recited this couplet :

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15. Askari, *Sīrat-i Fīrūz Shāhī*, p. 49.
16. Husamuddin Manikpuri, *Rafīq ul-'Arifīn* (Phulwari Sharif MS).

If I go ahead, I play the chamberlain :

If behind, I am but doing my duty.

This evoked a response from the Master, who recited this couplet :

If you go ahead, you are a lamp for the way :

If behind, you remain the refuge of the world.[17]

A meeting in February, 1361 A.D., however, is of no help to us, for the fifteen-year period would take us back to 1346 A.D. when *The Hundred Letters* were begun. It is impossible to speak of the founding of the hospice at this time, for the evidence indicates quite clearly that it was well and truly founded by then, as Zain Badr Arabi's Preface to *The Hundred Letters* amply reveals, for it was clearly a flourishing institution by that time. Also, in view of the lack of evidence for a meeting in 1354 A.D., this date for the return of the grant is difficult to accept. Indeed, when one reflects on the weighty evidence that associated the acceptance of the grant with fear of what the Sultan might do to the Governor if it were not accepted, coupled with the linking of the return to the removal of the cause of the fear, we have to conclude that it was returned rather promptly after the death of Muhammad bin Tughluq. Besides, how was Sharafuddin to know when the Sultan would come to Bihar in order to return it to him personally ? If he was uneasy about the grant he would have been anxious to return it, and would have done so rather promptly. He could have done. so through the same channels as he had received it, the governor. The conclusion is that it was returned by the end of 1351 A.D, which takes the founding of the hospice back to about 1337 A.D. as already established.

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17. *Malfūz-i Ruknuddīn Shattārī*, compiled by Imamuddin Shattari, K.B.O.P.L., Pers, MS 3010, pp. 37-8.

Appendix B

Wafāt Nāma,[1] (*Account of the Death*)

A number of the friends were present at the time of his passing. They hinted to this poor one that whatever the Revered Sheikh of Islam and of the Muslims had said and bequeathed to each one should be gathered and written down so that those who were absent might gain a share in those blessings. This account has been checked by those who are present.

It was Wednesday morning, the fifth of Shawwal, (2nd January, 1381), after the dawn prayer, that I paid my respects to the Revered Master. He was sitting on the new portico which had been built by Malik Nizamuddin Khwaja Malik. He was seated on his prayer-carpet. His brother, Sheikh Jaliluddin, his special attendant, and other relations and disciples, who had stayed awake, attending upon him night and day, were present. Qazi Shamsuddin, Maulana Shihabuddin, Khwaja Mina's sister's son, Maulana Ibrahim, Maulana Amu, Qazi Mina, Hilal Aqiq and some other dear ones were present.

The Master recited : "There is no power except from God Most Great." He invited those present to join in the recital. All did so. Then, smilingly, he said, "Praise be to God ! Even

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1. *Wafāt Nāma*, Pers. MS no. 3181, (K.B.O.P.L.),

at this moment Satan wants me to waver in my profession of faith in divine unity, but to no avail." He frequently cried out, "Praise be to God !" "I give thanks to God." "There is no power except from God. All blessings come from God." They all joined in the recital.

Shortly before noon he came out from the portico into the courtyard, supporting himself there on a pillow. After a little while, he held out his hand and, as though saying "good-bye," took hold of Qazi Shamsuddin's hand and held it for a short while, then let go. After this, catching hold of Qazi Zahid's hand, he placed it on his ble sed breast, saying: "We are the same ! We are both mad with love !" Then, humbly, he added, "Rather, we are dust beneath the feet of those maddened by love."

Then, with great feeling, he beckoned each one, kissing the hand and beard of each. He bade one and all trust in the mercy and forgiveness of God Almighty. He recited these words loudly, "Never lose hope in God's mercy ! He forgives all sins." He recited a couplet :

O God, Your mercy is a river flowing for all :

From it, there is a drop even for me !

He then turned his blessed face to those round about and said : "If you are asked tomorrow as to what you have brought with you, you should reply, 'Never lose hope in God's mercy !' " Then he added : "If I am asked, I shall say the same thing."

After that, he recited the formula, "I testify that God is One, and has no associates. And I bear witness to Muhammad as the servant of God and His Apostle." He also recited the prayer, "In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate ! I acknowledge God as my Lord, and I hold fast to Islam as my faith, and to Muhammad as the Prophet of God, and to the Quran, and to the Kaaba as the direction for prayer. I have the believers as my brethren. I also believe of Paradise and in the torments of Hell."

Then, turning towards Maulana Taqiuddin Asadi and extending his blessed hands towards him, he caught hold of his

hand and said, "May you have a good end!" He displayed great favour and generosity towards him and then made a reference to Maulana Amu, who was close by, on the portico. He ran up, saying "Here I am!" He had the honour of kissing his feet. Taking his hand, and rubbing it on his face and blessed breast, he said, "You have rendered me great service. I shall not abandon you. Rest assured, we shall be together. Tell the other companions that they should rest assured that, if I am honoured, I will not abandon anybody."

Afterwards, this poor unfortunate one, Zain Badr Arabi, placed his forehead upon the ground. Fearful and trembling, and desirous of renewing his allegiance and of asking pardon, he took the hand of the King of Mystics and, kissing it, placed it upon his eyes, even upon his pupils. He said, "Who is it ?" I replied, "The scabby dog of your exalted threshold, Zain Badr Arabi. I am sorry for my faults and wish to renew my allegiance." Due to an inner light which was in continuous effulgence, he recognized me immediately. He said: "Go, I have accepted you, as well as your whole household, all of whom are closely attached to me, and I accept them all. Rest assured that, if I am honoured, I shall never abandon anybody." I said, "The servants of the Master are honoured. Their hopes are high."

Then Qazi Shamsuddin came and sat by the Master. Maulana Shihabuddin and Hilal Aqiq enquired if there was anything to be said about him. He replied : "What can I say about him ? He is my son. How often in my letters I referred to him as my son or brother. He was the cause of my making manifest the knowledge of the dervishes. It was for his sake that I said and wrote so much, otherwise who would have taken the trouble to do so ?"

Then Sheikh Jalil, his own brother and special attendant, who was seated at his side, took his hand. He looked at him and said : "Jalil, compose yourself ! You will never be abandoned by scholars and dervishes. Malik Nizamuddin Kwaja Malik will come. Convey my salutations and blessings to him, and offer profuse apologies on my behalf, saying that I am

happy with him and that I am going to die in this happiness. You too should remain happy with me. Malik Nizamuddin will never abandon you."

Maulana Shibabuddin Nagori came forward. Several times he kissed his head, face, cheek, beard and turban, so much so that, from his face some effect was visible on his own. Exclaiming, "Ah ! Ah!" and uttering, "Praise be to God", he gave him his blessing. Maulana Shihabuddin fixed his gaze on the illustrous face of the Master and offered up prayers of thanksgiving. Afterwards, in praise of Maulana Shihabuddin, the son of Khwaja Mina's sister, he said: "You have done great service for me and have been very agreeable to me. Your behaviour has been excellent and you have served a me unstintingly—may you have a good end!"

At this stage, Maulana Shihabuddin recalled the services of Maulana Muzaffar Balkhi and Maulana Nasiruddin Jaunpuri and requested the Master to express his opinion about those two.

The Master most happily obliged and smilingly gave a sign by pointing all his fingers towards his own blessed breast and saying, "Muzaffar is my life! Muzaffar is my life! Maulana Nasiruddin is so too. Whatever pertains to succession and leadership is present in them. What I said to those people kept them away from temptation".

At this stage, Maulana Shihabuddin, uttering something, had the honour of kissing the feet of the saint, and asked to be accepted by him. The Master replied : "I have accepted you, and also your household." He granted him a cap and the privilege of renewing his allegiance.

After this, Qazi Mina kissed the blessed feet of the Master. Hilal introduced him and said that it was Qazi Mina, "at his service." He kissed the blessed palms. The Master touched his face, beard and cheek, saying "May God shower His mercy upon you!" He added, "Remain firm in your faith and depart in faith!" He added, "Mina belonged wholly to me!"

Then came Maulana Ibrahim who had the honour of kissing the Master's feet. He placed his right hand upon his beard and said, "You have dealt well with me, and have been most agreeable. You will remain honoured." Maulana Ibrahim said: "The Master has been pleased with me from the very beginning." At this the Master said, "I have indeed been happy with all, and you should also be happy with me. If anything untoward has happended, it was due to me."

After this Qazi Nuruddin, the brother of Qazi Shamsuddin may his heart be enlightened by knowledge and good behaviour came forward and had the honour of kissing the hand and feet of the Master, who took hold of his hand and, with great affection, rubbed it on his face, beard, cheek and hand. He then exclaimed, "Ah! Ah!" several times, and kissed him, so much so that the blessed face of the king of Mystics was joined to the face and cheek of Qazi Nuruddin. He said: "You have been very much in my company and have rendered me great service. I am happy with you. I shall seek dignity for you tomorrow."

After this Maulana Nizamuddin Dhankoti touched his feet. The Master said. "This poor man resolved to come and has reached me." He took the cap off his head and made a gift of it to him. He also prayed for his welfare in the next world, saying: "May God enable all poor people to achieve their purpose!" Then he apologized to all the beloved associates, saying, "O my friends, don't be worried about your faith: Remain steadfast in it!"

After this, Mahmud Sufi came and kissed the feet of the Master, who said, "Who is it ?" Hilal said that it was Maulana Sufi. Expressing his great sorrow, the Master said: "This poor man has no one to help him." He offered prayers for the happy outcome of his affairs.

The Qazi Khan Khalili came forward and had the honour of kissing the feet of the Master. "This poor Qazi Khan has been an old friend of mine. He was my constant companion, and has been closely associated with me." The Master prayed for his welfare and wished well of him, his sons and friends. He prayed to God for his deliverance from Hell.

Khwaja Mu'izzuddin followed and kissed the feet of the Master. He made his submission and the Master wished him a good end.

Then came Maulana Fazlullah, who kissed the blessed feet of his spiritual guide. The Master prayed to God for his safety and salvation. At this stage Fatuha, the old cook, the supervisor of the kitchen, stepped forward, weeping, to the side of the Master, and stood by his blessed feet. "Poor Fatuha belongs to me, as he always has!" He favoured him with wishes for a good end.

After this, Maulana Shihabuddin Zain, had the honour of kissing the blessed feet. Hilal introduced him, saying that it was Maulana Shihabuddin, the brother of Haji Ruknuddin. The Master bestowed on him the following blessed words : "Suffer patiently for your faith!" He urged him to support himself with the hope of God's mercy. He then recited the verse, "Never lose hope in God's mercy! He forgives all sins."

About the time for midday prayer, Sayyid Zahiruddin came with a cousin on his father's side and had the honour of securing an audience. The Master took him to himself and, after showing him great favour and affection, observed: "There is safety and salvation for you in the future world." Assuming an attitude of greater humility, he again offered prayers thrice and again took the Sayyid to himself, reciting the verse, "never lose hope in God's mercy! He forgives all sins." He raised the hopes of all those who were present, assuring them that they would secure the mercy and forgiveness of God. Thereupon, Sayyid Zahiruddin excused himself, rose and went to the portico where he sat down.

Then came Sultan Shah, the Lord of the district of Rajgir, who was accompanied by his son and had the honour of kissing the blessed feet. He offered a wind- relieving oil. The Master observed : "This had been brought by Maulana Nizamuddin also." Thereupon, he called for the distribution of sherbet and betel-leaves, along with his apologies.

After this, Munawwar son of Khalil the elder, came and sought the honour of being allowed to express his sorrow and make his submission. The Master said, "Come forward!" He extended his blessed hand towards him and honoured him with forgiveness and discipleship, using the scissors and placing a cap upon his head, and instructed him to perform two rounds of prayer. After this, his own son also was favoured with acceptance and a cap, and was also instructed to perform the two-fold prostration.

After this Qazi Alam Ahmad Mufti, brother of Maulana Nizamuddin Mufti, one of the chief disciples, had the honour of kissing his feet. He then respectfully seated himself upon his knees in front of the Master of the World. At this very stage, Amir Shihabuddin, brother of Malik Husamuddin, came with his son and kissed the feet of the Venerable Master and then sat down. As soon as the blessed eyes of the Master fell on his son, he said, "Come and recite the five chapters of the Quran." They said that he was, as yet, very young.

The son of Sayyid Zahiruddin Mufti was also present. When Hilal saw that the Master felt like listening to the Word of God, he called the lad so that he might recite the desired Chapters. Zahiruddin also realized that the Master wanted it, so he nudged his son to go up to the Master and recite the five chapters. The boy came, respectfully seated himself before the Master and recited, "Muhammad is the Apostle of God, and the faith is with him." The Venerable Master had been reclining against a pillow but he thereupon raised himself and, very respectfully, drew up his legs and sat upon his knees, as was his custom, and began to listen, with whole-hearted attention, to the recital. When the recitation reached, "The signs of prostration are visible on his forehead," the Master added, "This evokes the anger of the infidels, for they are struck with terror." The Master prompted the boy and, when the whole of the recital was finished, said: "He has acquitted himself well in his recital, but he was somewhat overawed."

On this occasion the Master made mention of a dervish from the West whose recital of the Quran was sometimes pleasing and sometimes hopeless, sometimes acceptable while at

others, not so. After this Qazi Alam was directed to distribute sherbet and betel-leaves, together with apologies.

The Master removed his gown and called for water to perform the ceremonial ablutions. He rolled up his sleeves, asked for a stick to bruh his teeth and, saying "In the name of God" in a loud voice, he began his ablutions. He recited the prescribed prayers for each action. He then washed both hands up to the elbow but inadvertantly forgot to wash his face. Sheikh Jalil pointed this out to him. He started all over again, beginning in the name of God and reciting the proper prayers. When Sayyid Zahiruddin and the others present in the assembly saw all this they were amazed at the care and punctiliousness shown in such a condition. The pious, abstinent Qazi Zahid extended his hands to help the Master to perform his ablutions but he was not allowed to do so, being directed to be seated. The Master then peformed the ablutions by himself. After this, he asked for a comb and combed his beard. Then he called for his prayer-mat and performed two rounds of prayer. He ended the prayer with thanksgiving to God and salutations to Muhammad and his descendants.

After some time he felt overpowered by weakness. He lay down to rest. Sheikh Jaliluddin suggested that the Master should go to the portico, for it was getting chilly. The Master put on his sandals and proceeded, with one hand resting on the shoulder of Sheikh Zahid and the other shoulder of Maulana Shihabuddin. He rested there upon a tiger-skin.

At this stage a woman came with her two sons in a palanquin. She had the honour of kissing the feet. She then departed.

As the time for the next prayer approached, the companions requested the Master to rest on the wooden bed. He did so. When the light had faded away, Sheikh Jaliluddin, Qazi Shamsuddin, Maulana Shihabuddin, Qazi Nuruddin, Hilal Aqiq and some other companions and attendants, who had been constantly at his service, occupied other beds.

After a while, the Master began to utter the Beautiful Names of God. He did so several times and then began to

recite His names while fingering his beads, saying "There is no god but You! I praise none but You!" I begin "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!" Then he uttered the Muslim profession of faith, "There is no god but God" and added, "I bear witness to the fact that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of God." Then he uttered, "There is no power except from God." He repeated these several times with his full strength, intense devotion and exultation.

After repeating, "O God, I pray to You and salute the Prophet," he raised his hands heavenwards and, with great eagerness, in the manner of inner converse with God, recited this prayer: "O God, better the state of the community of Muhammad! Have mercy on his community! O God, Forgive the sins of this community! Conceal their faults! O God, help and give victory to the faith of Muhammad and ease the lot of the members of his community, thus rendering them happy! May the enemies of the religion of Muhammad be disgraced! O God, display Your mercy!"

Having recited, "There are people who have neither fear nor sorrow" and "There is no god but God, no god but God! I begin in the name of God," he entrusted his soul to God. He departed from this present abode to the everlasting one. Emerging from the veil, he caught sight of the Friend!

This occurred at the time for night prayer on 6th Shawwal, 782 A.H. (Wednesday 2nd January, 1381 A.D.). He was buried the following morning.

Bibliography

The bulk of this study is based on the Persian source material, in both manuscript and printed form, available in the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna. The small number of secondary sources utilized are also mentioned.

There are a number of exclusively didactic works which have been attributed to Sharafuddin Maneri. They have not featured in this study because I have been concerned with the teaching found in *The Hundred Letters*. There is also the problem of ascertaining whether these works are from the pen of Sharafuddin or not, for the genuineness at least of some has been questioned.

It may be pointed out that the manuscript called *Mā'dan ul-Ma'ānī* in the Bodleian Library (no. 1263 in the catalogue of E. Sachau & H. Ethe), is really a copy of *Khān-i Pur Ni'mat*.

There is reference to a manuscript containing 125 letters of Sharafuddin in the India Office Library (Ethe, no. 1846). This is not an unknown collection of his letters but has come from the pen of Ahmad Sirhindi.

PERSIAN SOURCE MATERIAL

Bahr ul-Ma'ānī, *Mūnis ul-Murīdīn and Ganj-i Lā Yafnā* are all taken from an unnumbered MS of the Fatuha collection in the Khuda Bakhsh Library. They belong to the *malfūẓ* genre (discourse) concerning Sharafuddin Maneri. Their titles mean,

respectively : *An Ocean of Meanings*; A *Companion for Novices*; and *An Imperishable Treasure.*

Ma'dan ul-Ma'ānī (*A Mine of Sublime Realities*) is the first, and most important, of the collections of Sharafuddin's discourses. It was compiled by Zain Badr Arabi. The printed version, from Sharaf ul-Akhbar Press, Bihar Sharif, dated 1884, is quoted in this work.

Khwān-i Pur Ni'mat (*A Table Laden with Good Things*) is the second collection of discourses, again from Zain Badr Arabi. The printed version from Firdausi Khanqah, Bihar Sharif, dated 1903, is quoted in this work.

Mukhkh ul-Ma'ānī (*The Core of Spiritual Realities*), is another such collection. The printed version from Mufid-i Am Press, Agra, dated 1903, is quoted.

Malfūz uṣ-Ṣafar (*Discourses of Safar*), yet another of Zain Badr Arabi's efforts, was found as in a photographic copy in the Khuda Bakhsh Library.

Wafāt Nāma (*Death Account*) is—understandably—the last of the *malfūz* works on Sharafuddin. Persian MS no. 3181 in the Khuda Bakhsh Library was used for the translation of Appendix B.

Ganj-i Lā Yakhfā (*A Treasure no longer Concealed*) belongs to the same genre, but is a record of the sayings of Husain Mu'izz Balkhi. Persian MS no. 3979 in the Khuda Bakhsh Library is quoted.

As for the (*Maktūbāt* (*Letters*) the first collection, known as *The Hundred Letters* has been translated by the under the title *Sharafuddin Maneri*: *The Hundred Letters*. The work has been published by Paulist Press, New York, and S.P.C.K., London, in 1980, and by B.Y.B., Bombay, in 1985. All quotations and references pertain to this English rendition.

Se Ṣadī Maktūbāt (*Three Hundred Letters*), is a collection of various letters of Sharafuddin's. Unless otherwise stated, quotations in this work from *The Two Hundred Letters* and *The Twenty-Eight Letters* are from this printed text published from Kitab Khana-i Islami, Lahore (undated).

Sharḥ-i Ādāb ul Murīdīn (*A Commentary on Rules for Sufi Novices*) is a little known but very important commentary on a famous Sufi text book. The quotations are from Persian MS no. 1856, Khuda Baksh Library.

Muzaffar's letters are found in the *Maktūbāt-i Muzaffar Shams Balkhi* (*Letters of Muzaffar Shams Balkhi*). Persion MS no. 1859/A of the Khuda Bakhsh Library, is quoted.

Husain's letters are found in the (*Dīwān-i Husain Mu'izz Balkhī* (*A collection of Husain Mu'izz Balkhi*), Persian MS no. 1837) in the Khuda Bakhsh Library.

Manāqib ul-Aṣfiyā (*The Glorious Deeds of the Saints*) is a later work, compiled within a few decades of the death of Sharafuddin, and containing his first biography. It has to be utilized with caution. The printed work, from Nur ul-Afaq Press, Calcutta, 1895, is quoted.

A *malfūz* devoted to Gesu Daraz, *Tārīkh-i Ḥabībī*, compiled by Abdul Aziz in 1445, is also referred to—(Persian MS no. 3011 in the Khuda Bakhsh Library.)

Journals

JBORS Journal of the Bihar & Orissa Research Society

JBRS Journal of the Bihar Research Society

PUJ Patna University Journal

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By the Same Author

Khwan-i Pur Ni'mat

It is a collection of excerpts from the discourses of Sharafuddin Maneri, delivered in 1349-50 A.D. By the very fact that they cover such a wide range of topics the reader has the opportunity to look inside the minds of some Indian Muslims. A work of this nature is a needed corrective to the over emphasis on political & military history, which until recently has interest in social & economic history, constituted the staple fare of history text book.

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